

ABSTRACT

BRITISH RULE IN ASSAM, 1845 - 1858

by

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A thesis presented for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy of the University

of London, June 1956

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with British economic, administrative and social policy in Assam. Assam came under British occupation in 1826. The British Government abolished the old revenue system and made every cultivator the proprietor of his land. The Government released the slaves in 1843. As a result, the native aristocracy was reduced to great distress. The Government also abolished the system of allowing the hill tribes to levy tribute from the lowlanders, as a result of which the discontented tribes began to raid the plains. The Government adopted both the policies of conciliation and coercion.

Again, a new judicial system was introduced based upon the Bengal Regulations, but as the people were mostly illiterate, the system appeared too complex. Measures, therefore, had to be adopted to simplify it.

Further, schools were established and the Christian missionaries began their activities in Assam. As a result, ideas of social mobility were becoming popular, and the conservative sections of the people looked askance at these developments.

This was the situation of Assam in 1857.

When the Sepoy Mutiny broke out, the Assamese aristocracy made a bid to recapture their lost powers. But it ended in failure.

This study has been based both upon the official records of the East India Company and also upon Assamese sources.

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chapter I.

Introduction

The province of Assam came under British rule in 1826. At that time the land was in a distracted state from years of political instability and civil war. From 1826 to 1845 the Government was engaged in establishing a sound administration in the province, and at the beginning of our period, it could look hopefully to the future progress of the land.

Assam formed one of the provinces under the Bengal Government and was composed of six districts, namely Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur. It was administered by a Commissioner⁽¹⁾ who was also the Superinten-

(1) During our period the Commissioner was Francis Jenkins, the son of Rev. Francis Jenkins, vicar of St. Clements, Truro, Cornwall. He was born on 4th August, 1793. He arrived in India on 8th October, 1810, became Lieutenant in 1816, Captain in 1830, was appointed Commissioner and Agent to the Governor-General in Assam on 23rd January, 1834, became a Major in 1845, Lieutenant Colonel in 1851. He died on 28th August 1866 in Gauhati, Assam.

(Major Hodson - List of the Officers of The Bengal Army,
Part II, p.549.)

dent of police. As agent to the Governor-General in the North-East Frontier, he had a general superintendence over the Garo country and the hills of North Cachar, was the medium of communication with the Bhutan Government and superintended relations with all the numerous hill tribes in the Northern, Eastern and Southern frontiers.

The officers under him were the Deputy Commissioner, Principal Assistants, (who were also the Collectors of the districts), Junior Assistants, Sub Assistants, Principal Sadr Amins, Sadr Amins and Munsifs.

Numerous problems faced the Government in 1845. During the old Ahom rule, the king had been the master of all the lands in Assam, and each person called paik had to render compulsory services to the state. The king distributed lands, paiks and slaves to his subordinate officers and priests. The British Government abolished the old system, freed the slaves in 1843 and made every cultivator the proprietor of his land. As a result the landed aristocracy was reduced to great distress. But while the Government was busy reorganizing the revenue system of Assam on a ryotwari basis, many causes combined to hinder the progress of the province. Floods and epidemics were annual features of the land, a great portion

of the province was covered by wastes, wild animals destroyed much crop every year, labour was difficult to procure, land and water carriage were very expensive and the people were very poor. What trade there was, was monopolised by immigrants from Marwar. All these causes kept the revenue of Assam at a low level.⁽¹⁾ This problem of low revenue secured the attention of the Government.

The Government was also concerned with the rebellious attitude of some of the hill tribes. Many of these tribes had enjoyed various advantages under the native Government, such as rice lands in the plains and the right of levying contributions from the lowlanders. The new Government,

(1) The revenue of Assam, 1845-46:

Goalpara	Rs. 126,336	-	0	-	0
Kamrup	Rs. 270,114	-	15	-	1 $\frac{3}{4}$
Darrang	Rs. 157,846	-	2	-	9
Nowgong	Rs. 132,793	-	12	-	5
Sibsagar	Rs. 107,123	-	15	-	5
Lakhimpur	Rs. 37,807	-	11	-	0
Total	Rs. 832,052	-	8	-	8 $\frac{3}{4}$

(Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 26th August, 1846,
No. 318.)

naturally more powerful than the old Ahom Government, could not tolerate this state of affairs for long. As a result some tribes began to raid the plains. The Government had to adopt different methods to deal with the different tribes.

The British Government abolished the old Ahom mode of administration of justice which was based upon the principle of 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth', and introduced a new code of rules which were extracts from the Bengal Regulations. But in Assam where the people were mostly illiterate and where petty crimes abounded, the new judicial system appeared to be complex. So the Government had to adopt measures to simplify the judicial procedure.

Besides, three-fourths of the people of Assam were opium-eaters, and as a result, they became indolent and were unequal to any great exertion, either physical or mental. If the people generally sank low, the position of women was lower still. Many people took girls without marrying them, and as a result, many parents disposed of their daughters to the highest bidder.⁽¹⁾ The women were denied even the least portion of education and were excluded from every social circle. They were even

(1) The Orundoi, Vol. II, No. 12, p.91. Also, Mills: Report on Assam, p.34.

accounted unworthy to partake of religious rites, except in conjunction with their husbands and the wife was held unworthy to eat with her husband. As they were always confined to domestic duties and excluded from the society of the other sex, the people saw no necessity for the education of women. (1)

Again, the education which the vernacular schools afforded was of the most elementary kind, the students seldom aspired to a higher knowledge than a mere acquaintance with simple reading and writing. The Inspector of Schools observed that 'all instruction is unattainable to the labouring poor, whose own necessities require the assistance of the children as soon as their tender limbs are capable of the smallest labour. With the higher classes, and those that can afford to pay for a teacher, education usually ends at ten years of age, and never reaches further than reading, writing (a scarcely legible hand), and the simplest rules of arithmetic.' (2)

The living conditions of the people were extremely bad. Dr. McLean, the Assistant surgeon of Gauhati noted in 1851 that the people were 'ill-fed, ill-clothed,

(1) W. Robinson - A Descriptive Account of Assam, pp.274-277.

(2) Ibid, p.277.

ill-lodged, in short, exposed constantly to and greatly predisposed to diseases of many kinds, cholera among the rest. (1)

But if Assam was in this stagnant state in 1845, we gradually perceive signs of change. This backward province of the Indian Empire was slowly coming to the fringe of modern economic development and the isolation of Assam was soon going to be a thing of the past. The Assam Company had been floated in 1839 with the main purpose of cultivating tea, and by 1845 it had spent £180,000 in Assam. Meanwhile, the missionaries had begun their activities in the province, and their efforts and the new education impelled many people to look at problems in a new way.

This was the situation of Assam in 1845. A new economic structure was gradually emerging out of the shambles of the old Ahom order, thus depriving the former privileged classes of their position, natural calamities haunted the land, the hill tribes were in a discontented mood, the establishment of a new judicial system created many problems, and the growth of new ideas among some

(1) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 10th December, 1851, No. 151.

Dr. McLean to the Magistrate of Kamrup, 13th August, 1851.

people alarmed the conservative circles. The situation was indeed ominous in 1857. Taking advantage of the omissions and commissions of the Government, the suffering aristocracy attempted to stage a revolt in the year of the Mutiny. To trace and explain the history of these developments up to 1858 is the purpose of the following chapters.

The sources used include the official records of the East India Company and also some ^{SS}~~Aj~~amese sources.

Chapter II

REVENUE ADMINISTRATION of ASSAM,
1845 - 58

Under Ahom rule the population of Assam was divided into khels or clans under the control of the chief officers of the state, with their subordinates called Hazarikas (in charge of one thousand), Saikias (in charge of one hundred) and Boras (in charge of twenty). But an eye-witness of the time, Hamilton, observed that 'these numbers, and the numbers said to be granted to such officers, I am informed are merely nominal..... So that the Hatimuriya, or commander of 1,000, has sometimes in fact not more than 500'.⁽¹⁾ The people were thus distributed for particular purposes of the state, or for the service of the great officers and priests. Each of these persons, called paiks, was held bound to work four months in the year without wages or food, either for the king, or for whatever person the king directed. All public officers were allowed lands free of rent, which were cultivated by that proportion of the paiks that was compelled to work on their account,

(1) Hamilton - An Account of Assam, p.23.
From 1808 to 1814 Hamilton, under the instructions of the Governor-General, made a survey of the general conditions of the countries adjacent to the British territories.

and each received 'presents' from the men and officers subordinate to his authority.⁽¹⁾ As the king granted a part of these paiks to his officers for their maintenance and for the support of their dignity, no officials were paid from the treasury. The officer employed his paiks to cultivate farms called khats, and his outlay of money was small. Hamilton noted that 'every man who has a farm must, in general, work it himself, for labourers.....cannot be procured either for a share of the crop, or for money. The only assistance that can be procured is that of slaves, and a good many are employed by persons who have influence sufficient to secure property so tangible.....'⁽²⁾

The king also employed a vast number of men to work in his own farms, gardens, fisheries, mines, arsenals and for other royal purposes. The officers whom he employed to superintend these works were usually allowed to employ on their own business every twentieth man, and they also received 'presents' from their subordinates.⁽³⁾

(1) Ibid, p.23

(2) Ibid, p.64

(3) Ibid, p.24

The usual remuneration for the paiks in return for their services, was the allotment to each paik of full age of two puras (about two and half English statute acres) of rice land. Besides their share of paik lands, the paiks held bari (garden) lands exempt from direct taxation, but all the paiks throughout the country paid a capitation tax in lieu of, or as equivalent to, a rent for these lands.⁽¹⁾ The tax was variously named and imposed. In Kamrup it was a house-tax, in Nowgong and Upper Assam it was a body or poll tax (ga dhan) of one rupee for each paik of full age, in Darrang a hearth tax (charu) or a tax upon every family or person cooking separately of one rupee.⁽²⁾

The poll tax was, however, much heavier on certain khels or classes of the people who did not usually cultivate land. Thus, the gold-washers and the workers in brass paid five rupees a head, the makers of oil and fishermen paid three rupees, each, and the silk-weavers had to pay two rupees per head. Again, in some places a plough-tax was imposed of two rupees

(1) Boards Collections, Vol.2541 148,248, p.137
Jenkins to the Board of Revenue, 13 November 1849

(2) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 13 August 1851, No.5.
Jenkins to the Board of Revenue, 13 November 1849

and eight annas a plough.⁽¹⁾

When the khel system prevailed in its original form, the members of the Khel resided together, but in the course of time, when the paiks were allowed to commute personal service for money payments, they were given some freedom of migration, and as a result many had fled from their khel officers to escape taxation and persecution. Jenkins said that at the time of the British occupation of Assam 'very few khels remained together in any body, but were scattered throughout Assam, and the Pykes of many khels were frequently mixed up together in the same villages, each party or family paying their taxes to different collecting officers.....'⁽²⁾ He also said that because of the civil wars in Assam from 1780 to 1826 the people had almost given up cultivation, and lived on wild fruits. In his words, '....famine and pestilence carried off thousands that had escaped the sword and captivity. All men of rank, the heads of the great Ahom and priestly families,

(1) Ibid.

The revenue arrangements with the hill tribes were on a different footing altogether, and will be dealt with in the next chapter.

(2) Ibid.

had retired to one District, Gowalparra, having, with little exception, lost the whole of their property. With the nobility and gentry retired, a vast body of the lower classes.....'(1) According to Anandaram,⁽²⁾ the Burmese massacred more than one-half of the population of Assam 'which had already been thinned by intestine commotions and repeated civil wars'.⁽³⁾

(1) Mills - Report on Assam, p.3.

(2) Coming from a respectable family Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, after receiving elementary instruction in the Government school at Gauhat, completed his education in the Hindu College in Calcutta. In 1850 he was appointed sub-Assistant Commissioner, Nowgong district. On 1 December 1852 Jenkins observed that 'I consider the Phukan now fully qualified to conduct the duties [of a Deputy Collector] - he is not only an Assamese Gentleman by birth, and as such has had the management of Estates, but has been a Chowdry - so that to him the duties of a Deputy Collector will not be novel and besides, he has made the Regulations his particular study'. Accordingly, on 23 December 1852 the Governor of Bengal appointed him a Deputy Collector. (Bengal Revenue Consultations, 23 December 1852, No.12). He died on 16 June 1859.

(3) Anundaram Dakeal Phookun - Observations on the Administration of the Province of Assam, vide - Mills, Report on Assam, Appendix F, p.XXXI.

After the British occupation of Assam the revenue system was changed to a great extent. In 1834, in parts of Nowgong and in Darrang the khel system was abolished and the land tax was first collected by mouzas (revenue units composed of villages). In the same year the pergunas of Kamrup were entirely remodelled, and made into compact districts.⁽¹⁾ In 1836/37 the poll and the hearth taxes were finally abolished in Nowgong and Darrang. In 1837/38 the house-tax in Kamrup was done away with. During the same period, the whole of the bari lands were brought under a land assessment, but at a low rate, 'just enough to cover the taxes done away with.....'.⁽²⁾

The British Government recognized the ryots (who were formerly paiks) as having full proprietary rights in their land. No ryot could be dispossessed of any portion of his land except by the regular process of the civil courts.⁽³⁾ Anandaram observed that 'the recognition of the Ryot's rights as proprietors of

(1) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 13 August 1851, No. 5. Jenkins to the Board of Revenue, 13 November 1849.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid.

their respective holdings, is the greatest boon which... the British Government has conferred on the country. Every Ryot in Assam is the absolute master of his own lands, from which he is never liable to be ousted until he relinquishes it out of his own free will'.⁽¹⁾

The settlements were effected through the Chowdhuries or Mouzadars with each individual ryot throughout Assam. They were made annually, though long leases were tried in many places, but 'in the districts liable to inundations', wrote Jenkins in 1849, 'the adjustments required from resignations of land or entire changes of residence are very numerous; there appears to be no remedy that I can perceive to the necessity of making these annual adjustments'.⁽²⁾

Regarding the rates of assessment, the Government had, in the words of Jenkins, 'to satisfy themselves in all their proceedings that the finances of the Revenue would not be hurt by the change, at the same time that the rate proposed to be imposed on the Ryots would just amount to the former capitation tax to be extinguished'.⁽³⁾ In 1849 Jenkins reported that

(1) A. Phookun - Observations etc. vide - Mills, Report on Assam, Appendix F. p.XXXIV

(2) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 13 August 1851, No.5. Jenkins to the Board of Revenue, 13 November 1849.

(3) Ibid.

the rates established in the thirty-one pergunas and smaller mehals in Kamrup were as follows :-

Rupit⁽¹⁾ lands per pura - Rupee 1 - 4 annas.

All other descriptions of land per pura - Rupee 1.

The previous rates, Jenkins said, and those which still prevailed in the other pergunas, were as follows :-

Rupit per pura	Rupee 1 - 4 annas.
Basti or garden lands " ...	" 1 - 0 - 0
Faringati (dry) 1st rate " ..	" 1 - 0 - 0
" 2nd rate " ..	" 0 - 14 - 0
Bari 3rd rate " ..	" 0 - 8 - 0
Darrang and Nowgong .. rupit ^u ..	" 1 - 4 - 0
All other descriptions of land rupit per pura	" 0 - 14 - 0
Sibsagar rupit " "	" 1 - 4 - 0
other lands " " "	" 0 - 14 - 0
Lakhimpur rupit " "	" 1 - 0 - 0
other lands " " "	" 0 - 12 - 0

-
- (1) Rupit is derived from 'rupam', to plough. The rupit lands produced one crop of rice only in the year, but in some places a crop of very small value of the inferior dals (pulses) was sown amongst the rice and gathered after it. The lands other than rupit grew all the rich crops, such as mustard seed, poppy, sugar cane, betel nut, pan leaf, tea, lac, cotton, and silk plants, tobacco, fruit-trees and vegetables, and from some of them two crops were gathered in the year.

The Lakherajdars (who were Brahmins in charge of religious and charitable institutions, granted by the former kings of Assam) paid half the above rates, whatever they might be, in their respective divisions.⁽¹⁾

The reason for this difference in rates was that the natural calamities in Assam made it impossible to adopt any uniform rate throughout the province, for heavy rainfall converted good rupit lands into binbuti (wet) and faringati (dry land growing such crops as mustard and āhu rice) under the same circumstances became good rupit. Again, as Lakhimpur was thinly populated, remotely situated and suffered from want of markets, the rates there were lower than in other districts.⁽²⁾ Jenkins summarised the Government's policy thus, 'great alterations may..... be made with better husbandry [in the quality of lands], and it will certainly induce [conduce?] to the improved culture of the land if the ryot felt that his tax would not be increased as the land was ameliorated.... My wish was to have adopted such an average low rate of

(1) Beṅgal Revenue Consultations, 13 August 1851, No.5.
Jenkins to the Board of Revenue, 13 November 1849.

(2) Board's Collections, Vol.2541, No.148, 248, p.145
Jenkins to the Board of Revenue, 13 November 1849.

land tax as would leave every one a sufficient profit, and leaving capital and individual enterprize entirely unfettered, I was led to hope that not a few of the better class of ryots, taking advantage of soils and localities, and exercising a judicious selection of crops, might have advanced themselves beyond the mere support of existence, and by their industry have become small landed proprietors'.⁽¹⁾

In its attempt to establish a well-regulated revenue system, the Government was faced with serious difficulties.

First, the annual floods led to loss of crops, and compelled the ryots to migrate from one place to another. As the ryots were never sure of next year's crops, they were unwilling to contract leases beyond one year. Secondly, epidemics, both amongst men and cattle, pauperized the peasantry and checked the growth of population, thus ultimately effecting the revenue of Assam. Thirdly, the Lakherajdars, who held lands at half rates, were a constant source of trouble to

(1) Ibid, p.146

The Government released the slaves in 1843. As a result of this measure the upper classes and the 'numerous' Brahmins were 'totally ruined'. (Bengal Revenue Consultations, 18 November 1846 No. 2. Jenkins to the Sadr Board of Revenue, 17 July 1846.)

the Government as well as to the people, particularly in Kamrup.

In 1845 Major Matthie, the Deputy Commissioner of Assam, wrote to Jenkins that if the Bar Ali in the Sibsagar district could be repaired, inundations from the Brahmaputra would be prevented, and 'large tracts of excellent Rice grounds will be reclaimed in places it is greatly coveted.'⁽¹⁾ Accordingly, the Governor of Bengal sanctioned the sum of Rupees 1000 for this purpose.⁽²⁾

But inspite of these repairs, the ryots were not benefitted, for in the same year the whole of Upper Assam was visited 'by an unusual and.....unprecedented inundation, which.....did damage but not.....considerable to the new works.....'.⁽³⁾

In 1846 again 'severe' floods affected the province. Jenkins noted that 'relief afforded by a remission...

(1) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 26 March 1845, No.26. Matthie to Jenkins, 6 February 1845.

(2) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 26 March 1845, No.28. The Bengal Government to the Sadr Board of Revenue, 26 March 1845.

(3) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 22 October 1845, No. 24. Jenkins to the Sadr Board of Revenue, 13 September 1845.

is almost impossible in a ryotwarry system with such a multitude of cultivators, as the lands in Assam are divided amongst and how pernicious any such precedents are likely to be to a people so little industrious as the Assamese'. (1) In 1847 the Bengal Government granted the sum of Rupees 3266-10-10 for the repair and construction of embankments in Sibsagar and Lakhimpur. (2)

From 1848 to 1850 the inundations from the Nonai river in Darrang district overflowed the lands around the Punya bil to such a degree 'as to convert a very large extent of what was once "fine" Roopeet and Awsoo [a kind of crop planted in the cold season] lands into a swamp impassable save on the backs of Elephants'. (3) So in 1850 the Governor granted the

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- (1) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 19 May 1847, No.32.
Jenkins to the Bengal Government, 6 May 1847
 - (2) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 7 April 1847, No.55
The Bengal Government to Jenkins, 7 April 1847.
Also Bengal Revenue Consultations, 19 May 1847, No.34
The Bengal Government to Jenkins, 19 May 1847.
 - (3) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 21 August 1850, No.21
The Sadr Board of Revenue to the Bengal Government,
6 August 1850.

sum of Rupees 300 for the excavation of a canal to draw off the surplus waters of the Nonai river.⁽¹⁾

In the same year he sanctioned an outlay of Rupees 300 for the repairing of a bund at Jorhat.⁽²⁾

In 1851 Captain Reynolds, the Collector of Darrang, reported that because of the ravages of the Brahmaputra in the district there was 'a great falling off in the quantity of land cultivated'.⁽³⁾ The Deputy Governor sanctioned the sum of Rupees 2409-15-10 for the repair of the Trunk road (which also served as an embankment) in Darrang. He also granted the expenditure of Rupees 400 for the drainage of two marshy villages of the Mehal Chardwar in the district.⁽⁴⁾ In February 1851 Reynolds again reported that the 'fearful havoc' caused by the river Nonai had 'laid the country waste and the losses sustained by the ryots are immense both on the crops and fruit gardens'. He also said that the ryots had relinquished their lands in many

(1) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 21 August 1850, No. 28. The Bengal Government to the Sadr Board of Revenue, 17 August 1850.

(2) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 26 December 1850, No. 31. The Bengal Government to the Sadr Board of Revenue, 19 December 1850.

(3) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 19 March 1851, No. 68. Reynolds to Matthie, 10 January 1851.

(4) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 19 March 1851 No. 71. The Bengal Government to Matthie, 13 March 1851

places and several were preparing to quit their villages. The Collector further said that in Bonmali and Mutigai for the last two seasons the ryots had not harvested on an average one third of the crops, and Gowah and Nankoli 'not a single grain in seven-eighths of the holdings'.⁽¹⁾ The Deputy Governor granted the sum of Rupees 5,900 for the repair and construction of bunds in the district.⁽²⁾

In 1851 the Sub-Assistant Commissioner of Sibsagar reported that floods caused 'extensive damages' in the district, and 'entire villages and portions of eleven others have been deserted, together with large sheets of rice cultivation.....'⁽³⁾ In the same year, Captain Butler, the Collector of Nowgong, reported that because of the floods, there had been since 1844/45 a gradual decrease in the revenue of the Chapori Mehal, as can be seen from the following table :

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- (1) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 16 April 1851, No.9. Reynolds to Matthie, 12 February 1851.
 - (2) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 16 April 1851, No.10. The Bengal Government to the Board of Revenue, 9 April 1851.
 - (3) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 29 January 1852, No.70. The Sub-Assistant Commissioner to Brodie, the Collector of Sibsagar, 24 January 1851.

1844/45	Rupees	15,203 - 5 - 10.
1845/46	"	13,793 - 8 - 10.
1846/47	"	13,469 - 0 - 8.
1847/48	"	12,847 - 0 - 2.
1848/49	"	11,922 - 14 - 4.
1849/50	"	11,739 - 4 - 0.
1850/51	"	11,623 - 3 - 2.

He reported that no further increase in the revenue could be expected, except from an increase of population, enhancement of rates of taxation, or from extended cultivation. In his words, 'from these sources, however, we have little hope or expectation. The population has decreased in the Chapooree Mehaul from epidemics and from the frequent occurrence of inundations from the Burrumpooter we cannot enhance the rates of taxation, neither have we any hope of extended cultivation, for the natives are not [an] industrious or enterprizing class, they will not labour to better their condition and hence the smallest quantity of land is cultivated, sufficient to eke out their existence'.⁽¹⁾ Butler also stated that from

(1) Bengal Revenue Consultation, 18 June 1851, No.12.
Butler to Jenkins, 2 April 1851.

1845/46 to 1850/51 the decrease in revenue in the Chapori Mehal was Rupees 3580 - 2 - 8. Of this amount Rupees 2,347 - 13 - 7. resulted from Lakheraj grants, and the remaining decrease Rupees 1,232 - 5 - 1 might be attributed to the cholera and inundations. He said that the people who cultivated the Chapori lands were migratory, and during bad seasons left the lands. As a result, the ryots 'go from Mouzah to Mouzah and take up only the best and most productive lands. From this circumstance there is no stability in the revenue of any mouzah every year....' As a remedy against this state of affairs, the Governor of Bengal granted the sum of Rupees 2,215 'for the construction of new and repair [of] old embankments, the closing of certain streams for the protection of certain mouzahs in the District of Nowgong from inundation by the overflowing of the River Berhampootur'.⁽¹⁾

In 1851 Jenkins wrote that 'there has been a very general scarcity throughout the province.....such as has been seldom known in this Province, the result

(1) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 18 June 1851, No. 13.
The Bengal Government to the Board of Revenue,
18 June 1851.

of scanty crops for 3 or 4 years successively in several extensive districts of the country'. (1)

In the same year, Captain Reid, the officiating Executive Officer, Upper Assam, reported that floods caused great havoc in Sibsagar, and 'every year will make matters worse, and many of them [the cultivators] declare that it is only the love they have for their old grounds that make them remain where they now are, and if something be not done soon, the whole of the lands will be deserted and given up to jungle.' (2)

So, the Governor granted the sum of Rupees 3,824-14-9 for the construction and repair of bunds in the Sibsagar district. (3)

But in spite of the efforts of the Government to construct bunds, it was almost impossible to check the ravages of the floods. In 1852 Jenkins reported that with respect to bunds, 'the desired benefit appears not to have been derived', and he quoted the Collector of

(1) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 23 July 1851, No.38. Jenkins to the Board of Revenue, 30 June 1851.

(2) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 29 January 1852, No. 70. Reid to Brodie, 8 November 1851.

(3) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 29 January 1852, No.71. The Bengal Government to the Board of Revenue, 28 January 1852.

Nowgong as saying that 'many bunds or mouths of Jans (streams) were last year constructed but on the rising of the river most of them, I observed, were injured, and those that stood were of little real good for the waters rise and come in from other quarters; it is impossible to check inundation in the cha~~ll~~poorees and what is gained in one mouzah is lost in another'.⁽¹⁾

Thus, while floods and inundations caused havoc in Assam, in 1853 a terrible epidemic swept across the province, which took a heavy toll of both human lives and cattle. 26,392 persons died of cholera in Kamrup, and Nowgong districts (Kamrup 25,000, Nowgong 1,392), and 141,625 head of cattle perished by an epidemic murrain (the disease was described as being similar to cholera) in the two districts (Kamrup 120,000, Nowgong 21,625).⁽²⁾ Cholera also caused 'very extensive' mortality in other parts of Assam.⁽³⁾

(1) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 10 March 1853, No.14. Jenkins to the Board of Revenue, 7 October 1852.

(2) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 7 July 1853, No.15. The Board of Revenue to the Bengal Government, 28 June 1853, and also Bengal Revenue Consultations, 9 February 1854, No.8. The Board of Revenue to the Bengal Government, 17 January 1854.

(3) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 9 June 1853, No.7. The Board of Revenue to the Bengal Government, 27 May 1853.

Dr. Barry, the Civil Surgeon of Goalpara, reported that 'the opium-eaters.....are seized with cholera by hedges and way-sides, and die in hundred and thousands. They die not only at Nowgong and Kamroop but in all parts of the province, whenever opium is indulged in, but they die in those 2 Districts in larger numbers simply because the population there is more dense and simply because opium is grown and eaten there more largely than in any other division of the province. The opium eating is the cause of the great mortality in Assam generally, and in Kamroop, Nowgong and Mungledye in particular'.⁽¹⁾

Dr. Long, the Civil Surgeon of Sibsagar, reported that in many places in the district, 90 per cent of the whole stock of cattle were attacked by diseases. He stated that 'it is certain that there are very many cows carried off by this pestilence - At Kumar Gong, Golaghat and Kachari Hat I saw the paths and the fields strewn with skeletons - At Kachari Hat, where I found the disease, the air was tainted with the

(1) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 9 February 1954, No.9.
Barry to the Principal Assistant Commissioner,
July 1853.

carcases lying about - so strong was it filled with the effluvia that a copperish taste was very sensibly felt in the mouth when in the neighbourhood from my own personal observation I can state that in some of the homesteads visited by me every head of cattle in the place was attacked'.⁽¹⁾ Dr. McLean, the Assistant Surgeon of Dibrugarh, noted that in the affected mouzas in Lakhimpur 60 per cent of the cattle were attacked and of these 40 per cent died.⁽²⁾

In July 1853 the Governor of Bengal instructed the Board of Revenue 'to enquire whether the local authorities can suggest any means of checking such excessive mortality or of preventing its recurrence'.⁽³⁾ But Jenkins frankly admitted that 'European surgeons and their assistants can do little in such instances of general disease, as we have lately had, and I am sorry to say there is constantly a deficiency of the

(1) Ibid. Long to Holroyd, the Collector of Sibsagar, 28 September 1853.

(2) Ibid. McLean to Captain Dalton, the Collector of Lakhimpur, 14 November 1853.

(3) Board's Collections, Vol.2639, No.168,095, p.5. The Bengal Government to the Board of Revenue, 7 July 1853.

necessary European medicines in our hospital stores....' (1)

Captain Holroyd, the Collector of Sibsagar, made some suggestions for the improvement of the breed of cattle by importing bulls from the North-West. But Jenkins considered them premature because of 'the low state of agriculture in the Province [7] the very small holdings of the Cultivators and the total absence of any wealthy or large farmers'. (2) Agreeing with Jenkins, the Board of Revenue held that the import of bulls would not be of any use, as they would be just as susceptible to diseases as the Assamese breed, and also said that the Assamese people were not ready to adopt sanitary measures to prevent the progress of contagious cattle diseases. The Board also held that 'beyond encouraging the local officers to suggest and advise they can do nothing toward removing the causes which it is generally allowed favour the visits of the cholera and aggravate the consequences of murrain'.

(1) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 9 February 1854, No.9.
Jenkins to the Board of Revenue, 18 November 1853.

(2) Board's Collections, Vol.2639, No.168,095, p.11.
The Board of Revenue to the Bengal Government,
17 January 1854.

They quoted Dr. Barry as saying that the cholera in 1853 'will be known for ages as the most malignant and fatal epidemic that has hitherto assailed the land'.⁽¹⁾

Besides epidemics, the floods were, as before, a source of great harassment to the people. In 1854 it was reported that because of the breaking away of the bund along the Disang river in Sibsagar 'many ryotts had absconded and others were expected to abandon their lands'.⁽²⁾

So the Governor granted the sum of Rupees 2,000 for the repair of the embankments on the Bhogdoi and Disang rivers in Sibsagar district.⁽³⁾

To prevent the recurrence of floods in Nowgong, in 1854 127,800 ryots engaged themselves voluntarily to repair and reconstruct thirty-four embankments.⁽⁴⁾

(1) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 9 February 1854, No.8. The Board of Revenue to the Bengal Government, 17 January 1854.

(2) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 23 February 1854, No. 7. The Board of Revenue to the Bengal Government, 7 February 1854.

(3) Bengal Revenue Consultations 23 February 1854, No. 8. The Bengal Government to the Board of Revenue, 9 February 1854.

(4) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 20 July 1854, No.15. The Sub-Assistant Commissioner, Nowgong to Jenkins, 28 April 1854.

The Sub-Assistant Commissioner of Nowgong hoped that 'the construction and repair of the bunds now undertaken will materially improve the value of the lands in the populated portion of the District, and I conceive an extension of cultivation and a consequent increase of public revenue will undoubtedly follow the success of these bunds'.⁽¹⁾

The Board of Revenue reported that the most important of these embankments had been constructed by the former Government 'at an immense outlay of labor, but of late years they have been gradually going to decay, and little or nothing has been done to repair them.' The Board observed that the ryots suffered greatly because of the neglect of the embankments. To keep these bunds in good order, the Board suggested that a scientific officer should be appointed to take charge of these bunds.⁽²⁾ But the Governor of Bengal declared that he did not see 'the probability of having it in his power to appoint any scientific officer to the charge of the above embankments',⁽³⁾

(1) Ibid.

(2) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 20 July 1854, No.15.
The Board of Revenue to the Bengal Government 7 July 1854

(3) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 20 July 1854, No.17.
The Bengal Government to the Board of Revenue,
15 July 1854.

In 1854 a terrible epidemic broke out amongst the cattle in the district of Lakhimpur, which greatly retarded the progress of cultivation in the district. Captain Dalton, the Collector, observed that 'many of the [ryots] had to turn up their land without the assistance of ploughs, the quantity planted in the Dibroghur and adjoining mehals, was not more than one fourth below the usual average'. He also said that ryots holding 56,393 bighas of land assessed at Rupees 13,996, lost within the year 17,417 head of cattle, the estimated value of which was Rupees 1,06,112.⁽¹⁾

Besides the natural calamities and the epidemics which hampered the growth of cultivation in Assam, there was another obstacle to the increase of the land revenue. This was the class of Brahmin Lakherajdars in charge of religious and charitable institutions who paid half the rates which others were assessed at. In the whole province more than 7,75,464 puras of land had been confirmed at half rates.⁽²⁾ Jenkins observed that

(1) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 28 June 1855, No.17.
Dalton to Jenkins, 17 May 1855.

(2) Mills - Report on Assam, p.24.

'many of the religious institutions of Assam and of Kamroop especially go back to a great antiquity'.⁽¹⁾

The Lakherajdars of Kamrup paid Rupees 48,000 as revenue to the Government in 1846, and their estates consisted of the best lands in the district.⁽²⁾ The

Government had prohibited the sale of the Lakheraj lands for arrears in 1834, as it feared that 'the sale by a Government officer might have the effect of deceiving the purchaser who might suppose that the land was not liable to be brought under full assessment'.⁽³⁾

In 1846 Captain Scott, the Collector of Kamrup, observed that the Lakherajdars were the cause of great harassment and perplexity, and a great source of anxiety to the Collector, but that over them he had not the same power nor the same prospect of immediate recovery

(1) Mills - Report on Assam, Appendix H, p.XXIV
Jenkins to Mills, 13 June 1853.

(2) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 24 February 1847, No.17.
Captain Scott, the Collector of Kamrup to Jenkins,
28 October 1846.

(3) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 24 February 1847,
No.17. Jenkins to the Sadr Board of Revenue,
20 November 1846.

of their arrears. He also noted that the whole of the Lakherajdars were proverbial for never paying any portion of their dues until they were absolutely forced into doing so, but to arrive at the crisis was 'a work of no inconsiderable difficulty'. Captain Scott had offered to make a settlement for a lease of seven or ten years upon their own measurements, but they declined the offer. He also said that owing to their mismanagement and oppression their cultivators were annually deserting and their estates deteriorating. These landed proprietors, the Collector held, who owned their estates on the most favourable terms as regards taxation and quality of soil in their holdings and who were, therefore, the best able to pay the Government dues with ease and punctuality, were, on the contrary, the most backward in payment. Besides, the Collector had no means of promptly recovering their arrears, for no security was demanded from them as from the Chowdhuries, and under existing orders their Lakheraj lands could not be sold for arrears.⁽¹⁾

(1) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 24 February 1847, No.17. Scott to Jenkins, 28 October 1846.

To remedy 'this unsatisfactory state of affairs' Scott suggested that the Lakherajdars should be given a ten years' lease and during this time, like the Chowdhuries, they were to benefit from all extension of cultivations and sustain all losses from lands being thrown out of cultivation. But Jenkins could not agree. He said that 'the Brahmins not being able to cultivate themselves have been in general reduced to much wretchedness by the loss of their slaves as they can now only get their lands cultivated by ryots, and where, as it is too frequently the case, waste lands are abundant, they can only obtain the assistance of the neighbouring ryots under very disadvantageous terms, nor can they depend at all upon them, for the regular cultivation of their lands, so that they could not enter safely into engagements for long periods'.

Scott's next suggestion was that the rule of 1834 which exempted their lands from liability for arrears should be rescinded, so that their lands might be sold for arrears. Jenkins agreed with this view.

Scott's third suggestion was that if the Lakherajdars refused to take the lease proposed, one half of their estates should be resumed and the remaining half made

over to them rent free. But Jenkins disagreed, and said that many of the Lakherajdars would not be able to maintain themselves in possession of their lands, if rendered liable to sale, 'until under the advanced progress of the Province lands shall become of such value as to be readily rented to ordinary cultivators'.⁽¹⁾

The balances outstanding in Kamrup at the close of the 4th quarter of 1845/46 amounted to Rupees 77,598, and of this sum Rupees 35,000 were connected with Lakheraj claims and were remitted by the Board of Revenue as irrecoverable. The Board noted in 1847 that 'the peculiar position of the so-called Lakherajdars of the District will, if allowed to remain unaltered, always present an obstacle to the due realization of the Government demand'.⁽²⁾ Accordingly, the Deputy Governor of Bengal rescinded the order of 1834.⁽³⁾

(1) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 24 February 1847, No.17. Jenkins to the Sadr Board of Revenue, 20 November 1846.

(2) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 24 February 1847 No.16. The Sadr Board of Revenue to the Bengal Government, 3 February 1847.

(3) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 24 February 1847, No.18. The Bengal Government to the Board of Revenue, 24 February 1847.

But the Lakherajdars continued to give trouble to the Government. In 1849 Jenkins observed that they always quarrelled among themselves in Kamrup and the Government found it very difficult to collect revenue from them. Besides, a great number of complaints were made against the persons they employed in the collections.⁽¹⁾

Anandaram also observed in 1853 that 'under the present system, the revenues of the [religious] endowments are usually misappropriated by the leading members attached to them, and the community have no interest or necessity for preferring complaints for such misappropriations. The endowments have been conducted to the promotion of private interests rather than the fulfilment of the original intentions of the endowers'.⁽²⁾

Mills reported in 1853 that the Lakherajdars were the worst cultivators and rent-payers, the revenues of the endowments were universally appropriated to

(1) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 13 August 1851, No.5.
Jenkins to the Board of Revenue, 13 November 1849.

(2) A. Phookun - Observations etc. vide- Mills,
Report on Assam, Appendix F, p.XIiii

private uses, and the holders of land did nothing towards bringing under cultivation the large tracts of jungle assigned to them.⁽¹⁾

Major Butler declared in 1854 that the priests were interdicted from collecting more than the Government rate of Khiraj land, but yet they collected twice that amount. The ryots were mere slaves, he said, and they were obliged to render any service to them at their command. Two-thirds of the grants of this privileged class were laid waste. To quote his words, 'it would be well if their tyranny was confined to exacting the utmost of the produce of the land the Ryutts can give; but this is not all. They demand from the Ryutts, on a variety of pleas, Bagee Khurcha, or Hath Kurch money, to defray present necessities; Burgonee, a general tax; Magunee or free gifts of dhan, sursoo oil, and rice; Morecha, or fees on marriage; and sulamee, or presents on appointing their servants to conduct the fiscal duties of the shustro land'.⁽²⁾

(1) Mills - Report on Assam, p.25

(2) J. Butler - Travels and Adventures in Assam, p.240.

The Government, however, possibly because of the fear of public opinion, did nothing to bring about any change in the arrangements with the Lakherajdars. (1)

But if floods and inundations effected the economy of Assam, if epidemics swept off thousands of men and cattle, if the Lakherajdars were a running sore in the revenue system, the revenue organization itself contained many defects. Mills pointed out that the measurements of the fields of each mouza were 'not systematically and carefully tested; that the objections of Ryots are not examined and discussed, and if erroneous, corrected in the Moffussil; that the pottahs are not distributed by the collector, and that the settlements are generally made at the Sudder station'. (2)

Mills also said that often the Kabuliots of the ryots were pronounced to be forgeries, and false measurements and incorrect classification were very common. (3) He further noted that the practice of

(1) The Chief Commissioner of Assam observed in 1896 that these landholders at half rates had continued to hold their lands at the same rates to that time. In 1879 the Government of India recognized their estates to be heritable and transferable. (E.A.Gait - The Assam Land Revenue Manual, p. lxxii)

(2) Mills - Report on Assam, p.6.

(3) Ibid.

concealing land was 'extremely prevalent', and as a result the interests of the Government were sacrificed to 'almost any extent'.⁽¹⁾

Mills also observed that the risks of collection of revenue were great, and the commission allowed to cover them was small. As a result, the mouzadar was driven 'to exact the uttermost farthing from the resident Ryots if he cannot meet his losses by assessing newly reclaimed lands. His lease if of short duration; his tenure of office is insecure, and he is not, therefore, interested in keeping up cultivation to the utmost'.⁽²⁾ He reported that since 1848-49 there had been no great advancement in cultivation.⁽³⁾

While admitting that there were many obstacles to the increase of revenue in Assam, Mills contended that

(1) Ibid. p.7.

(2) Ibid, p.8.

(3)	<u>Districts</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Quantity of land under cultivation</u>
	Darrang	.... 1849-50	(Puras) 1,75,211 - 1 - 6 - 0.
	"	.... 1852-53	" 1,67,774 - 2 - 2 - 5.
	Nowgong	.... 1849-50	(Bighas) 5,50,299 - 1 - 12 $\frac{1}{4}$ - 0.
	"	.... 1852-53	" 5,28,703 - 3 - 14 $\frac{1}{4}$ - 0.
	Sibsagar	... 1849-50	(Puras) 1,26,123 - 3 - 0 - 14.
	"	.... 1852-53	" 1,35,505 - 2 - 10 - 0.
	Lakhimpur	.. 1849-50	(Acres) 21,234
	"	.... 1852-53	" 21,483 $\frac{1}{2}$
	Kamrup	.... 1849-50	(Puras) 3,54,467 - 1 - 4 - 17.
	"	.... 1852-53	" 3,59,023 - 3 - 10 - 0.
(Mills - Report on Assam, p.5.)			

'notwithstanding these hindrances to improvement, I am not satisfied that under a better regulated and uniform Revenue system more might not be done, and that the increase of cultivation and Revenue should not steadily progress'.⁽¹⁾

In 1853 the Governor of Bengal observed that 'the whole Revenue system of the Assam Province is on an unsatisfactory and scarcely intelligible footing. Annual settlements with consequent enquiries of the most minute and vexatious kind prevail..... The Revenue of the Province since 1843/44 has been nearly stationary'. He also declared that he intended to take measures to revise the revenue system of Assam and for placing it on 'an improved footing', so that it might lead to the improvement of the province 'instead of being a bar to it, as would now seem to be the case'.⁽²⁾

The anomalies of the revenue system of Assam secured the attention of the Court of Directors also. In 1854 they wrote to the Governor-General that '..The

(1) Ibid.

(2) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 10 March 1853, No. 15. The Bengal Government to the Board of Revenue, 10 March 1853.

distracted state of the province, before it came under our dominion, and the imperfections of a system of annual settlement with an unsettled population, all combine to render the task of the revenue officers difficult. If at all practicable, we are of opinion that the introduction of leases for a term of years, leaving to the Ryot the benefit of any improvement effected by his own industry and outlay, would be productive of much benefit, and tend greatly to raise the province from its present condition. We desire that your attention be given to this point'.⁽¹⁾

But because of the natural calamities in the land, the cultivators were unwilling to contract for long leases. Already in 1851 Jenkins wrote that besides the floods, several other causes militated against the 'adoption of any regular revenue system' and the contracting of long leases in Assam. He said that the greater demand for hired labour allowed 'the poorer Ryotts the choice of either cultivating lands, or of engaging

(1) Revenue Letter to Bengal, 5 April 1854, No.10.
Revenue Letters to Bengal, Vol. 26.

themselves as coolies [labourers]'. Again, the decrease of opium cultivation from the introduction of Government opium led many ryots/^{to}leave their lands, for, it was 'no longer a very remunerative crop'. Further, the quantity of waste lands was the chief cause of the unsettled habits of the ryots, 'especially of a very large class, the Cacharees, who are not attached to their villages by orchard cultivation'. Jenkins further said that the judicial duties of the revenue officers combined with the constant changes of officeholders occasioned by sickness and other causes, were great hindrances towards the adoption of a regular revenue system.⁽¹⁾

Mills reported that the mouzadars had evinced the greatest reluctance to take a lease of even two years. He said that 'they [the mouzadars] urge that they are not men of capital, that if they take a lease of three years, the year after the settlement the Ryots resign the land, and do not take up the same extent resigned, how are they to pay the difference, having no money or property; they would be utterly ruined, and if

(1) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 31 December 1851, No. 44. Jenkins to the Board of Revenue, 12 November 1851.

they paid the loss sustained, it must be levying from the remaining Ryots the amount, thus the Mouzadars and Ryots would both be oppressed and ruined'.⁽¹⁾ By the orders of the Board the Collector of Nowgong had been directed to select twenty of the most respectable mouzadars who were given twenty per cent on the jumabandi, and a lease for five years, with an assurance that any unlooked-for calamity would be favourably considered. Twenty chapori mouzas had been so settled, but nineteen out of twenty of the mouzadars had thrown up the leases, as the ryots threatened to leave the mouza if their jummas were not annually adjusted, and the mouzadars, finding that the commission would not secure them from loss in the event of their leaving, solicited the cancellation of their leases.⁽²⁾

So the local officials in the province regarded long leases as unsuitable to conditions in Assam.⁽³⁾

(1) Mills - Report on Assam, vide - Nowgong, p.9.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 28 August 1856, No.11. The Board of Revenue to the Bengal Government, 22 February 1856.

Even as late as in 1896 the Chief Commissioner of Assam reported that periodic settlements did not find favour with the Commissioner (from 1871 to 1887) and the majority of the district officials. of Assam reported that periodic settlements did not find favour with the Commissioner (from 1871

The Government of Bengal, therefore, left it to the discretion of the Commissioner to introduce long-term settlements whenever he might think fit.⁽¹⁾

To increase the revenue of Assam, Anandaram suggested in 1853 that agricultural methods should be changed by improving the implements of cultivation and by manuring and irrigating the fields.⁽²⁾ But Mills, while admitting that 'the agriculture in Assam is in a very primitive state', also observed that 'the plough is suited to the strength of the cattle; any attempt to alter the implements or the mode of husbandry would, in my opinion, be of no advantage whatever'.⁽³⁾

The Government paid some attention to the clearing of the vast extent of the waste-lands of the province. Many causes combined together to retard the occupation of waste lands both by Europeans and by the natives of Assam. The remoteness of the most valuable tracts of waste lands from those districts in Bengal in which European capital and skill had been principally employed

(1) E. A. Gait - The Assam Land Revenue Manual, p.lxiii

(2) A. Phookun - Observations etc., vide - Mills, Report on Assam, Appendix F. p. XXXViii

(3) Mills - Report on Assam, p.21.

was one main cause of the neglect of the wastes in Assam.

In the Goalpara district or that next to Rangpur and Myemensing in which Europeans had long been settled, there were extensive wastes along the Brahmaputra river, but generally subject to heavy inundations. A great portion of the waste lands of the Kamrup district were subject likewise to heavy floods and were unfit for sugar cultivation.⁽¹⁾

In 1846 Jenkins observed that in Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur there were tracts of land lying waste and unprofitable which were admirably adapted to the culture of the sugar cane and offering many superior advantages, such as fuel in abundance for the mere cutting, or quarrying, but he said that these lands were quite unknown to European capitalists.⁽²⁾

Already in 1838 the Government had granted some waste lands on special terms. First, no grant was to be made of a less extent than 100 acres, or of a

(1) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 1 July 1846, No.3.
Jenkins to the Government of India, 27 March 1846

(2) Ibid.

greater extent than 10,000 acres. Secondly, one fourth of the entire area was to be in cultivation by the end of the fifth year from the date of the grant, on failure of which the whole grant was liable to resumption. One-fourth of the grant was to be held in perpetuity revenue-free. On the remaining three-fourths no revenue was to be assessed for the first five years if the land was under grass, ten years if under reeds and high grass, and twenty years if under forest. On the expiry of this term revenue was to be assessed at 9 annas per acre for the next three years, after which the rate was to be for twenty-two years Rupee 1 - 2 an acre.⁽¹⁾

In 1846 Jenkins observed that several causes tended to prevent the natives of Assam from breaking up wastes more extensively. First, 'the Collector and Chowdries constantly apprehend a present diminution of Revenue by the migration of ryotts holding lands and paying rents.' Secondly, the Chowdhuries

(1) E. A. Gait - The Assam Land Revenue Manual, p.xvii

were 'jealous of any one settling in their Pergunnahs and Mouzahs who are likely to be independent of them'. Thirdly, 'the act which freed their slaves has deprived almost every Assamese gentleman of the power of cultivating any but the smallest plots of lands, for where each man is, or may be not only a cultivator but a landlord, hired labour is scarcely procurable and no rent can be obtainable as yet each ryot would rather cultivate for himself than another'.⁽¹⁾

Accordingly, the Deputy Governor of Bengal directed the Sadr Board of Revenue to suggest improvement on the working of the rules for the grant of waste lands in Assam.⁽²⁾

In reply to this, in 1846 Jenkins stated that there were vast tracts of waste lands in Nowgong fit for sugar cultivation, but 'the agriculturists are so poor that the cultivation of a single acre by any of our ryots without assistance from capitalists would be almost impossible'.

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- (1) Bengal Revenue Consultation, 1 July 1846, No.3.
Jenkins to the Government of India, 27 March 1846.
- (2) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 1 July 1846, No.5.
The Bengal Government to the Sadr Board of Revenue,
1 July 1846.

In Lakhimpur also there were 30 to 40,000 acres of land well-suited for sugar cultivation, but this was not 'a fraction of the larger portion of waste out-lying forests on the frontiers of this Division, equally well suited for the same plant.' In Darrang the quantity of good lands available for cane culture amounted to 96,000 acres of land 'besides the large quantities in the eastern districts.....' In Sibsagar the waste lands amounted to 21,500 puras, but this did not include the forest tracts under the hills, and in the Western Division there was a large proportion of wastes. In Kamrup the waste lands could not be 'less than a lac of acres.....available for sugar'.⁽¹⁾

Jenkins noted that the vast extent of the waste lands in Assam rendered the country unhealthy, and were a 'cover for myriads of wild beasts which thence spread out and destroy the crops, they encourage the ryots to abandon their cultivated lands and they render all lands unsaleable'.⁽²⁾

(1) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 18 November 1846, No.2.
Jenkins to the Sadr Board of Revenue, 17 July 1846.

(2) Ibid.

Jenkins therefore suggested that if 'any broad cultivation such as cane and Indigo' could be encouraged in these wastes, both the Government and the people would gain 'for it would be accompanied by the introduction of Capital and a class of labourers amongst the Assamese, lead the Ryots to extend their own small patches of cultivation and by restraining the unlimited command of wastes which they now possess, give a value to the lands they hold and force them to a more industrious culture of them'. (1)

Jenkins proposed that publicity should be given to the large quantities of land available in Assam, and to the terms on which grants of wastes were to be procured. He urged that 'some measures calculated to give a stimulus to the agriculture of the Province, are the more essentially required now' as the upper classes were ~~totally~~ ruined by the loss of their slaves. (2)

He also observed that because of the great proportion of jungle to that of cultivation, landed property

(1) Ibid

(2) Ibid.

in Assam was very nearly unsaleable. He held that 'unless our uncleared lands are taken up by capitalists for the cultivation of some of the great articles of foreign export, such as sugar cane and Indigo, the progress of cultivation in the common agricultural proceedings of Assamese must be extremely slow'.⁽¹⁾

In 1848 Jenkins wrote to the Sadr Board of Revenue that the rule of 1838 which required the grantees to bring one fourth of the entire area under cultivation by the end of the fifth year should be amended. He proposed that in all cases in which the grantees failed to bring one half of the grant under cultivation in three years, the grants should be absolutely resumed or be resumable if the Collectors advised that measure. He held that 'by conceding the indulgence as recommended, we shall have gained so much good that some few individuals will have been induced to cultivate farms of considerable size instead of being all cultivators of the miserable small plots, which the common ryots only farm'.⁽²⁾

(1) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 18 November 1846, No.4
Jenkins to the Board of Revenue, 8 September 1846

(2) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 25 May 1848, No.43.
Jenkins to the Sadr Board of Revenue, 25 January 1848.

Accordingly, the Governor of Bengal sanctioned the measure suggested by Jenkins.⁽¹⁾

In 1849 Jenkins again reported that the extent of uncultivated land in Assam was 'immense' and said that at some future period 'with a tax of only 8 annas a beegah in the cultivated lands, which they might well bear now, the revenue may be much more than doubled'.⁽²⁾

In 1852 Captain Rowlatt, the Collector of Kamrup, wrote to Jenkins that if by any means people from other parts of India could be induced to take up jungle grants in the province, the greatest good would result to the country by the introduction of more industrious people, a better system of cultivation, and other description[s] of crop not produced by the Assamese. He also said that to remove the apathy of the people there should be a mixture of people from other parts, especially of European settlers 'who would introduce the cultivation of produce not now attended to and be

(1) Bengal Revenue Consultations 25 May 1848 No.44.
The Bengal Government to the Board of Revenue,
25 May 1848.

(2) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 13 August 1849, No.5.
Jenkins to the Board of Revenue, 13 November 1849.

of great advantage to the country in giving the stimulus so much required'.⁽¹⁾

In 1853 Major Vetch, the officiating Commissioner of Revenue, Assam, observed that because of the ease with which the Assamese could satisfy their moderate wants, it fostered 'an indolent contentment than act as a stimulus to further exertion'. The inaccessibility of the land and the difficulty of procuring labour, he said, were two main hurdles in the path of the development of Assam. He noted that 'at present the ordinary time taken by a country boat of 1000 maunds' burden from Calcutta to Debrooghur is as great as that of a voyage round the Cape to London by a sailing-vessel'.⁽²⁾

According to Vetch, it would be unwise to grant waste lands to the natives of Assam, for the forest lands in the province were taken up by 'the most wandering and least industrious' of the ryots who, after cultivating them for three years, abandoned them as 'useless and exhausted'. He also held that the shifting of ryots

(1) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 12 August 1852, No.6.
Rowlatt to Jenkins, 18 February 1852.

(2) Mills - Report on Assam, Appendix C, p.XI.
Vetch to Mills, 22 June 1853.

from old locations to new ones in the jungles was always attended with a heavy mortality and acted as a check to the population 'so much wanted in Assam'. It also, he said, narrowed the breadth of cultivation for 'a family who cultivates say 9 beeghas of roopit or rice land which has been brought under regular tillage, would probably not cultivate half that quantity on new clearing for the first three years'.⁽¹⁾

Vetch therefore opined that for the rapid development of Assam, they 'must look almost entirely to the introduction of foreign skill and capital'.⁽²⁾ He said that the Government should grant waste lands to capitalists 'on any terms' which would give a great impetus to trade and agriculture in Assam. He also suggested that if tea cultivation could be encouraged in Assam, 'every acre brought under tea would force four more of waste into cultivation to meet the wants of the tea-growers and tea-makers'. He further said that sugar-planters should also be encouraged 'who would import their own labourers from the populous districts of Bengal'.⁽³⁾

(1) Ibid, p.XV

(2) Ibid, p.xiii

(3) Ibid, p.xv.

Agreeing with these views of Major Vetch Jenkins wrote to Mills in 1853 that 'the only other great means of improvement' of Assam that the Government had was the encouragement to Europeans to occupy waste lands for the purpose of cultivating the great staples for export. He said that 'there are few Provinces the lands and climate of which are more favourable than those of Assam for some of the great articles of trade, but a long, tedious, and expensive communication with the seaport of Calcutta is a great drawback to European enterprize, and another is the want of labourers.....the want of labourers can only be obviated by importing settlers.....'.⁽¹⁾

Considering all these views, Mills, in 1853, declared himself against the granting of waste lands to the natives of the province 'except under peculiar circumstances'. In his words, 'they have no capital, and their only resource is to seduce other Ryots to settle in these grants, so that as much or even more becomes

(1) Mills - Report on Assam, Appendix B, p.v - vi

waste in one place than is reclaimed in the other'.⁽¹⁾
 He held that only the granting of absolute rent-free tenures of land would induce people to bring English capital into the province, and said that 'we must not look for a return too soon; the object is to clear these vast tracts of forest, and promote immigration'.⁽²⁾

The Board of Revenue agreeing with Mills wrote to the Bengal Government in 1854 that in Assam, while granting waste lands, they had to look rather 'to ultimate than to present revenue'. The Board, sharing Mills' apprehension that the grant of wastes to the natives of the province would lead to 'their abandoning lands now under cultivation', fixed the minimum area of grant to five hundred acres. The Board thereby hoped that a high minimum like this 'would debar agriculturists of the Revenue from applying without rendering it necessary to draw a distinction between them and Europeans which would be an invidious one'.⁽³⁾
 Accordingly, on 23 September 1854 the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal approved these rules for the grant

(1) Mills - Report on Assam, p.16.

(2) Ibid, p.17.

(3) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 31 May 1855, No.8.
 The Board of Revenue to the Bengal Government,
 19 September 1854.

of waste lands in Assam.

First, 'no grants shall be for less than 500 acres of forest or grass waste which will be granted on the same terms.' Secondly, 'one fourth of the grant to be exempted from assessment in perpetuity for the site of houses, tanks, roads, embankments etc. but not so as to be separable from the rest of the grant or exempt from liability on account of the proportion of the grant subject to assessment.' Thirdly, 'the other three fourths of the grant to be also rent free for 20 years, after which it shall be assessed for 10 years at one anna and a half per annum per acre for 10 years more 3 annas per acre for 10 years more at 4 annas and a half per acre, and from the 51st year, for 48 years at 6 annas per acre, the whole term being fixed for 99 years'. Lastly, 'after the 99th year the grant shall be liable to survey and resettlement.....'. (1)

But in 1855 Jenkins wrote to the Board of Revenue that as it was difficult to obtain good tea lands in

(1) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 31 May 1855, No.10.

one place and as it needed much capital to start tea cultivation, he would propose to extend the privileges of the new rules to minor speculators.⁽¹⁾ So in 1856 the Lieutenant Governor authorized the Board of Revenue 'to reduce the limit of a Grant in ordinary cases to 200 acres', and also approved of 'the local officers being vested with a discretionary power to go as low as 100 acres when the circumstances of a particular case may seem in their opinion to justify it'.⁽²⁾

On 19 April 1856 Jenkins again wrote to the Board of Revenue that although 'very little good' had yet been done by allowing grants to native ryots and upper classes because of 'the great poverty of the gentry and their ineptitude to the management of landed Estates', still of late a tendency was evident amongst them 'to create for themselves farms in the hope of maintaining their families by this means'. He would therefore propose that any natives, Assamese or Bengalis, who could satisfy the Collectors of their ability to

(1) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 3 April 1856, No.41
Jenkins to the Board of Revenue, 3 March 1855.

(2) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 3 April 1856, No.42.
The Bengal Government to the Board of Revenue, 31 March 1856.

bring ryots from districts outside Assam division should be allowed grants of land on the terms of the new rules whatever they might choose to cultivate. ⁽¹⁾

Accordingly, the Lieutenant Governor approved of the grant of waste lands in Assam 'for the future to Europeans, Assamese, Bengallees, and others, without distinction, and the cultivation of whatever produce the Grantee may think proper'. ⁽²⁾

While the Government granted waste lands on liberal terms, already in 1845 the Assam Company claimed that they had brought 2,000 puras of land under tea cultivation and had cleared another 2,100 puras for the same purpose. They had opened and repaired 800 miles of public roads, had erected 266 bridges, and had established several ferries on rivers across which no facility of transport existed before. The Company employed about 6,550 natives and Bengalis monthly, had sent 7,000 Bengal

(1) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 22 May 1856, No.29.

(2) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 22 May 1856, No.30.
The Bengal Government to the Board of Revenue, 22 May 1856

coolies (labourers) into the province.⁽¹⁾ After eight years, in 1853, the Company's expenditure in the province exceeded one lakh of rupees a year.⁽²⁾

In 1847 a steam communication was established between Calcutta and Gauhati. In 1853 the Directors of the Assam Company observed that this measure 'has proved to residents and persons engaged in commercial pursuits in the Province, of essential service and benefit, in the greatly improved facilities it has afforded for a safe and speedy communication with the Province.... It appeared also to offer a practical means for the effectual conveyance of coolies [labourers]'.⁽³⁾

The results of these changes were soon apparent. On 20 March 1857 the Board of Revenue quoted the Collector of Lakhimpur as saying that '.....It will be some years before much increase to the revenue can be derived by assessment of tea lands; but indirectly great advantages are obtained. The price of labor has risen, coolies of this District are now obtaining 4 Rupees

(1) Board's Collections, Vol.2087, No.96,850, p.64-66.
The Secretary to the Assam Company to the Court of Directors, 14 January 1845.

(2) Mills - Report on Assam, Appendix E, p.XXI
The Directors of the Assam Company to Lord Dalhousie, 6 June 1853.

(3) Ibid, p.XX.

a month, the same as the imported laborers, and expenditure in the District by Tea Planters is between 50,000 and 60,000 Rupees per annum, and the estimated value of the tea crop for the current year is Rupees 65,000 (130,000 lb.). Of the indigenous tea tracts, nearly all of any value have been appropriated.....'(1)

During the next few decades Assam saw the rapid rise of the tea industry, and both directly and indirectly, it greatly added to the prosperity of the province, thus fulfilling the expectations of the Government. But this story of the expansion of the tea plantations belongs to a different period.

(1) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 22 April 1858, No.8.
The Board of Revenue to the Bengal Government,
20 March 1857.

Table

REVENUES OF THE DISTRICTS OF ASSAM

(showing the decrease and the slow rise of revenue
in the districts) -

Net revenue of Kamrun -

1846-47	Rupees	3,26,137	- 10	- 2.	
1847-48	"	3,26,217	- 15	- 5.	
1848-49	"	3,32,498	- 10	- 7.	
1849-50	"	3,45,708	- 0	- 11.	
1850-51	"	3,52,615	- 3	- 1.	
1851-52	"	3,53,447	- 7	- 1.	(1)

Net Revenue of Darrang -

1846-47	Rupees	159,927	- 14	- 0.	
1847-48	"	158,418	- 13	- 2.	
1848-49	"	160,250	- 3	- 1.	
1849-50	"	159,328	- 9	- 2.	
1850-51	"	156,679	- 2	- 9.	
1851-52	"	151,226	- 5	- 1.	
1852-53	"	152,795	- 6	- 9.	(2)

(1) Mills - Report on Assam, vide - Kamroon, Appendix C.

(2) Ibid. vide - Durrung, p.11.

Net revenue of Nowgong -

1846-47	Rupees 1,34,314 - 5 - 8.
1847-48	" 1,33,489 - 7 - 8.
1848-49	" 1,29,999 - 8 - 1.
1849-50	" 1,29,781 - 1 - 4.
1850-51	" 1,30,156 - 5 - 6.
1851-52	" 1,28,985 - 4 - 5.
1852-53	" 1,30,437 - 3 - 1. (1)

Net revenue of Sibsagar

1847-48	Rupees 1,40,952 - 10 - 6.
1848-49	" 1,40,952 - 10 - 6.
1849-50	" 1,43,927 - 1 - 0.
1850-51	" 1,46,578 - 14 - 11.
1851-52	" 1,49,818 - 1 - 5. (2)

Net revenue of Lakhimpur

1848-49	Rupees 37,480.- 8 - 11.
1849-50	" 37,811 - 5 - 10.
1850-51	" 42,832 - 2 - 9.
1851-52	" 43,340.- 12 - 0.
1852-53	" 46,563 - 8 - 2. (3)

Mills -

(1) ~~Ibid~~ Report on Assam, Vide-Nowgong p.11.

(2) Ibid vide - Sibsagar, Appendix D, p.xlix

(3) Ibid vide - Luckimpoor, " A, p.iv.

Revenue of Assam from 1849 to 1857.

	Demands	Collections	Remissions	Net Balances
1849/50-	9, 96,355	7,23,243	...	2,56,817 (Exclusive of remissions) (1)
1850/51-	10,68,650-13-6	7,92,802-12-1	50,706-4-2	2,25,141-13-3. (2)
1851/52-	10,34,872-3-1	7,10,140-10-	5236-3-11	3,19,495-5-2 (3)
1852/53-	11,54,551-11-3	8,52,873-9-9	6080-15-0	2,95,597-2-6. (4)
1853/54-	11,15,508-0-2	8,96,562-4-5	153-4-7	2,18,793-7-2. (5)
1854/55-	10,49,250-9-11	8,49,366-5-11	8799-15-6	1,91,084-4-6 (6)
1855/56-	10,35,711-13-11	8,66,191-15-7	17,911-7-3	1,51,608-7-1 (7)
1856/57-	10,15,745-13-2 $\frac{1}{2}$	8,62,741-7-1 $\frac{3}{4}$	1401-0-7	1,31,602-5-5 $\frac{1}{2}$ (8)

- (1) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 13 August 1851, No.4.
 (2) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 19 August 1852, No.5.
 (3) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 10 March 1853, No.13.
 (4) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 30 November 1854, No.5.
 (5) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 28 August 1856, No.6.
 (6) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 28 August 1856, No.11.
 (7) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 22 April 1858, No.8.
 (8) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 1 October 1857, No.7.

Chapter III

The Government and the hill tribes, 1845-58.

The frontiers of Assam are inhabited by hill tribes - notably the Bhutias, the Daphlas, the Abors, the Mishmis, the Nagas, the Kukis and the Garos.

On the North-West of Assam lay the Bhutan territory and its inhabitants were called the Bhutias. To the east of Bhutan, another hill tribe called the Daphlas occupied the territory eastward of the Bhoroli river, the hilly north of Naduar (the nine passes) in Darrang, and Cheduar (the six passes) in Lakhimpur, as far east as the upper courses of the Sundri. To the further east of the Daphla hills lay the Abor land. The term Abor signifying barbarous rule, was applied by the Assamese very indefinitely to all the independent hill tribes on both sides of the Assam valley, but it applies more particularly to the tribes on southern slopes of that portion of the great Himalaya range between the Dihong and the Sodemshim rivers. There were five settlements of

Abors or as they called themselves 'Padam' in the lower ranges bordering on Assam in the vicinity of the Dihong river, Member, Siluk, Padu, Pashi and Bunjir. In regard to their relations with the British Government they were called the united or confederated Padam states, but each community in its internal affairs was governed by its own laws.⁽¹⁾ In the extreme north-east of Assam, almost the whole hills were inhabited by the Mishmis.

To the South-east of the Sibsagar district, lay the Naga territory. The most powerful tribe of the Nagas, the Angamis occupied the hills between the several streams of the Dhansiri river, bounded on the north by that river, on the south by the central range of the high mountains forming the Manipur territory and Nowgong, on the east by the Dihing river and on the west by an imaginary line drawn from Dimapur to Beremah.⁽²⁾ To the South-West of the Naga hills, in the great southern range of mountains between the Kapili and the Dhansiri rivers there lived the Kukis. In

(1) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 3 January 1856, No.133. The Journal of Captain Dalton, Principal Assistant Agent to the Governor General, (n.d.).

(2) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 14 June 1855, No.193. Note on the Nagas by the Bengal Government. (n.d.).

the extreme West of the province, on the South bank of the Brahmaputra, a tribe called the Garos were scattered over a broad belt of low hills, surrounding the higher ranges near Goalpara.

As the British Government had to pursue different policies in regard to the different tribes, and as its policy towards the Nagas had a particular bearing upon some of these tribes, we will begin with the Nagas.

Before the coming of the British, the native Ahom Government recognized the rights of the different hill tribes over a large front on both sides of Upper and Lower Assam. On the Southern bank of the Brahmaputra river, all the inland fishery and a strip of land under the hills were surrendered to the Nagas. The Northern districts of Kamrup called the Duars were given up to the Bhutias for a mere nominal tribute of gold, blankets, ponies and so on.⁽¹⁾ To the east of Darrang, the Duars or passes of the North bank were saved from the depredations of the Abors and the Daphlas by the Ahom Government's agreeing to pay a certain sum of the revenues to them and by allowing the tribes the right

(1) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 13 August 1851, No.5. Jenkins to the Board of Revenue, 13 November 1849.

to use a proportion of the inhabitants called the bohottias as porters.

Even when in the latter part of the 18th century, the Ahom kings imposed a capitation tax of three rupees for each able-bodied man in the country, two-thirds of the taxes of the bohottias were remitted or left for their hill masters, and one third levied for the state. When the British occupied Assam in 1826, the actual value of the contributions levied by the hill people upon those of the plains was estimated to be about 5500 Rupees.⁽¹⁾

Besides these exactions, the Nagas, the Abors and the Daphlas established a right to a share in certain customs or market dues. Thus 'in course of time what was first given as a voluntary peace offering, became by prescription a contribution in salt of regulated quantity amounting altogether to 79 maunds'.⁽²⁾ Again, the Nagas and the Abors exacted dues from the gold washers who carried on their operations in the streams flowing from their hills.⁽³⁾

The dependence of five of these tribes - the

(1) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 20 July 1852, No. 127. Captain Dalton, the officiating Political Agent Upper Assam to Jenkins, 19 May 1852.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid.

Nagas, the Bhutias, the Mishmis, the Abors and the Daphlas - upon the plains arose from the very nature of their economy. The Nagas had much difficulty in maintaining themselves in their rocky mountains. They did not cultivate the same piece of land for more than two years in succession.⁽¹⁾ S.E. Peal, a tea planter, after visiting the Naga hills remarked, 'the labour they are put to for a scanty crop is almost incredible.' Because of their shifting mode of cultivation, he said, 'they thus require far more land than the ryots in the plains, especially if the smallness of the crop yielded is taken into account.'⁽²⁾ One Naga chief told him 'of the difficulty which his people had in getting grain, and that they then relied to a great extent on several villages in the plains.' Peal said that 'we in fact heard that in the Rajah's house alone was there any considerable quantity of grain from last year's crop.'⁽³⁾

J.W. Masters, a botanist, reported that because of the rocky nature of the Naga hills 'there is very little spare ground for gardens, or cultivation of any kind in

(1) S.E. Peal - "Note on a visit to the tribes inhabiting the hills south of Sibsagar" in Selection of Papers regarding the Hill Tracts between Assam and Burma, p.319 (n.d.)

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid, p.323.

the villages, but on every little spot on which a few inches of soil is found, attempts are made at gardening. In these are found onions, mustard, tobacco, and a few stocks of sugarcane. (1) Peal noted that to every forty or fifty square miles there were about four villages of some one hundred families, yet from the shifting method of cultivation 'not more than an eighth or tenth of the land available can be cultivated at one time, and population would seem to have reached its maximum.' (2)

Again, during the civil wars in Assam before the coming of the British, many cultivators in the plains who used to supply grains to the Nagas had fled, thus causing hardship to them. (3) Another Naga chief complained to Captain Brodie, Principal Assistant Agent that they suffered greatly because of the desertion of the villagers in Hatigarh, who used to supply them with big knives. (4)

Because of the precarious nature of their economy

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- (1) Board's Collections Vol. 2140, No. 101978, p.215-16. Masters to Brodie, Principal Assistant Commissioner, Assam, 29 March 1844.
- (2) Selection of Papers etc. p.330.
- (3) "Report of a visit by Captain Vetch, Officiating Agent, Upper Assam to the Naga frontier of Lakhimpur, 1842." Ibid. p.257.
- (4) Ibid, p.288. Brodie to Jenkins, 15 September 1841.

the Nagas carried away the defenceless villagers in the plains until their friends effected their ransom by giving cloths, conch shells, beads, pigs and cows.⁽¹⁾ The value of slaves and cattle was estimated at the following rate, a male slave was worth one cow and three conch shells, a female slave was worth three cows and four or five conch shells.

A cow ...	...	...	...	ten conch shells
A pig ...	...	...	...	two conch shells
A goat ..	...	...	...	two conch shells
A fowl ..	...	...	...	one packet of salt.

'The price of salt in the plains is 7 rupees per mound of 40 seers or 80 lbs., and a conch shell is worth 1 rupee, so that a male slave is worth 13 rupees or 26s., a female slave 34 rupees or 68s., a cow 10 rupees or £1, a goat or pig 2 rupees, or 4s. each.'⁽²⁾ Sometimes the Nagas kidnapped the Assamese and sold them even in Manipur, Cachar and Bengal.⁽³⁾

The Bhutias were particularly dependent upon the plains for their supplies. Captain Pemberton reported

(1) Mills - Report on Assam, Appendix M. p.cxliv.
Jenkins to Mills, 4 June 1853.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Bengal Criminal and Judicial Consultations, 10 December 1845, No. 150. Jenkins to the Bengal Government, 1 November 1845.

in 1838 that 'these Dooars form ... the most valuable portion of the Bootan Territory; through them and from them are procured, either directly or indirectly, ^lalmost every article of consumption or luxury which the inhabitants of the Hills possess. Their principal trade is with them; the priests and higher classes of the laity subsist almost exclusively upon their produce.'⁽¹⁾ He also observed that their Government was 'so insecure', population was scanty and inert, the soil was barren and the total amount of cattle was 'lamentably small.' John Butler wrote that 'whether the Bootan hills will furnish a sufficient support for their scanty population~~s~~ seems problematical; and if pressed by hunger it is not improbable that the Booteahs will rush down and ravage the fertile plains of Assam.'⁽²⁾

The Mishmis also were in a precarious economic position. One British officer after a visit to the Mishmi territory reported that 'agriculture appeared to be conducted in the most rude and simple manner, and the use of the plough is unknown, when the time of sowing approaches, the

(1) Eden and others - Political Missions to Bootan, p.95.

(2) J. Butler - A Sketch of Assam, p.187.

surface of the ground is merely scratched with a small kind of hoe which penetrates but a few inches into the earth and domestic animals with the exception of pigs and fowls are not reared '(1) Besides, they were 'very deficient' in all branches of manufacture. They took from Assam salt and various kinds of cloth, and gave in return Mishmi tita (very popular in Assam for its smell) and poison. (2)

The Garos and the Kukis, on the other hand, were self-sufficient in their economy. Another British officer after visiting the Garo hills noted that the Garos brought a great extent of land under cultivation and said that 'the Garrows appear generally in good circumstances everywhere I went.' (3) Jenkins also observed that the Garo land was 'extremely fertile' and it produced so much cotton that it supported a large population in 'comparative abundance.' (4)

(1) Board's Collections, Vol. 2140, No. 101, 978, p.103. Lieutenant Rowlatt of the 2nd Assam Light Infantry to Jenkins, 1 January, 1845.

(2) Ibid, p.99.

(3) India Political Consultations, 17 July 1847, No. 23. Lieutenant Dalton, Principal Assistant Agent to Jenkins, 17 June 1847.

(4) Mills - Report on Assam, Appendix M. p.cxviii. Jenkins to Mills, 4 June 1853.

As regards the Kukis, Jenkins reported that 'their rice is of a very superior description to any I saw in Northern Cachar ... their cotton is also fine, besides they grow tobacco and all the vegetables met with in the hills.'(1)

Again, the Abors carried on a barter trade with the people of Assam. Captain Dalton, after visiting the Abor territory remarked that 'industry and richness of the soil make up for deficiencies and seasons of scarcity are rare with them'. They took from Assam salt, iron, brass, cooking pots, a few silver ornaments, and gave in exchange their white cotton cloths, ginger, red pepper and sometimes rice.(2)

The British Government in the beginning did not disturb the relations of the tribes with the Government which prevailed since the Ahom days, and tried to make conciliatory arrangements with them. While this policy of conciliation succeeded in relation to the Kukis, the Abors and the Daphlas, the Government found it very difficult to bring about peaceful relations with the Nagas, the Bhutias,

(1) Ibid, p.cxxxix.

(2) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 3 January 1856, No.133 - The Journal of Captain Dalton (n.d.)

the Mishmis and the Garos. Where the policy of conciliation failed, the Government had to undertake military measures. But this policy of chastisement was very often a failure. First, the hills were almost inaccessible, and supply was very difficult. Secondly, the tribes had little or no property, so that when the army entered their territory, they took cover in the hills. Thirdly, the Nagas, the Garos and the Kukis indulged in head-hunting, so that military measures alone could not eradicate their traditional habits. Lastly, amongst the Nagas internal feuds were common, so that the Government found it impossible to make them take to peaceful habits.

'If a man [Angami Naga] has killed another in war, he wears three or four rows of cowries round the kilt, and ties up with his hair with a cotton band. If a man has killed another in war, he is entitled to wear stuck in his hair one feather of the Dhoones bird, and one feather is added for every man he has killed, and these feathers are also fastened to their shields.' (1) S.E. Peal after visiting one morrang (dead house) consisting of 350 skulls declared that 'we were conscious of being face to face with

(1) Mills - Report on Assam, Appendix M, p.cxlii.

the great cause of this tribal isolation, constant warfare evidently a custom of great antiquity. As long as social position depends on tatooing, as here, and can only be got by bringing in the head of an enemy, so long shall we have these wars and consequent isolation of clans.' (1) Peal described how he asked a Naga the way he got his 'ak' or right of decoration by tattoo. The Naga replied that he went out and lay in wait a long time near a spring and at last a woman came for water, and he chopped off her head instantly. Peal said that 'it was utterly incomprehensible to him how such a thing could be unmanly. I found it [a] waste of time and breath to convince him.' (2) Jenkins also asked a Naga how he got his decoration. He replied that he followed a neighbouring Naga and speared him through the back while he was eating his dinner. (3)

(1) Selection of Papers, etc. p.325.

(2) Ibid, p.326.

(3) India Political Constultations, 21 March 1851, No.249. Jenkins to the Government of India, 5 March 1851.

Carnegy, the Political officer of the Naga hills wrote on 12 September 1876:

'In the middle of July a party of 40 men of Mozema went over to Kohima, and were admitted by one of the khels (clans) friendly to them, living next to the Puchatsuma quarter, into which they passed and killed all they could find, viz. one man, five women, and twenty young children. The people of the other khels made no effort to interfere, but stood looking on ... One of the on-lookers told me that he never saw such fine sport (i.e. the killing of the children), for it was just like killing fowls.' (Census of India, 1891, Assam, Vol. 1, p.238).

Let us now deal with the relations of the various tribes with the Government. First of all, we will deal with the Nagas. The Bengal Government declared that 'they are the wildest and the most barbarous of the hill tribes in that quarter and are looked upon with fear and horror by the people of the plains; subdivided amongst themselves, they have at the same time no unanimity with each other, and never act in concert together. Each village is a sort of hill fort either made so by art or fortified by nature, and so jealous and suspicious of its neighbours as to be ever-ready to wage war with it to the knife on the slightest provocation. Quarrels amongst themselves are therefore of constant occurrence and as it is totally incompatible with Naga honour to forego revenge, the murder of a relative or friend is never forgotten, and their bloody feuds consequently seldom finally terminate.'⁽¹⁾

Again, though every village community had a nominal head or chief, these chiefs had no absolute power over the people. In matters of importance 'the counsel of the warriors is more frequently adopted than the sober advice

(1) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 14 June 1855, No.193.
Note on the Nagas by the Bengal Government (n.d.)

of the elders and more peaceably disposed.' (1)

Of the several tribes of the Nagas, the Angamis (independent or unconquered) were the most powerful. In 1855 it was reported that the number of Angami villages was forty-nine and the population above 50,000 men. (2)

The British Government first came into contact with the Angamis in 1832 and 1833, when attempts were being made to open a communication through the Naga hills between Manipur and Assam. But the expeditions ended in failure because of the resistance of the tribes.

In 1844 the Government in order to put an end to their incessant feuds, decided to compel the refractory Nagas to attend its courts 'where the [their?] complaints would be enquired into, and engagements taken from the offenders to enforce their good behaviour.' (3) Besides interfering in their feuds, the Government also decided to exact a nominal tribute from the Nagas 'to obtain some sort of acknowledgement from these rude tribes of its being the power paramount ' (4) But while the chiefs

(1) Mills - Report on Assam, Appendix M, p.cxliii.
Jenkins to Mills, 4 June 1853.

(2) Bengal Judicial Proceedings 14 June 1855, No. 193.
Note on the Nagas by the Bengal Government (n.d.)

(3) Board's Collections, Vol. 2140, No. 101,978, p.162.
Jenkins to the Government of India, 14 September 1844.

(4) Ibid, p.69. Captain Eld, the Assistant Agent to
Jenkins, 10 January 1845.

agreed to obey the wishes of the Government, their followers refused to pay the tribute and to acknowledge its supremacy.

In November 1844 the Angamis committed a bold outrage on a British detachment located at Sankari and killed three sepoy and wounded one. When the British troops entered the guilty village, they found it entirely deserted and almost every article was removed. As there was no hope of catching the fugitives, they burnt three villages, Akari, Beren and Konoma.⁽¹⁾

But these measures did not secure the peace which it was the object of the Government to establish; rather a spirit of deeper enmity was now engendered. In January 1845 Captain Eld, the Assistant Agent frankly admitted his failure to seize the guilty Nagas, a failure which he said was 'attributable to the almost impervious nature of the country and the utter impossibility of ever being able, unless by their own free-will, to catch hold of these rude but active savages, into whose mountain haunts none but their own feet could think of venturing ' He also suggested 'the total suppression of that iniquitous traffic

(1) Ibid, No. 101,979, p.39.
Jenkins to the Government of India, 3 April 1845.

in human flesh for which the large and wealthy village of Beren has been so long and infamously celebrated, and to which done nine tenths of those horrible frontier outrages may fairly be attributed.'(1) He said that the country was intricate, that pursuit was impossible and because of lack of provisions in the villages attacked, the detention of troops was impracticable and because of the distance from British posts supply was difficult. He also held that from the month of February to November, the Nagas could 'commit any atrocities they please with perfect impunity.'

Because of these difficulties, Jenkins observed that 'to omit inflicting the only retribution in our power [the burning of villages] would I fear from our experience of the Nagas be only to embolden them to fresh attacks.'(2)

But the Government of India declared that the burning of villages was not justified and instructed the local authorities rather to act 'in all circumstances

(1) Board's Collections, Vol. 2140, No. 101,979, p.43. Eld to Jenkins, 10 January 1845.

(2) Ibid, p.38.
Jenkins to the Government of India, 3 April 1845.

with strict justice and moderation, than by having recourse to these harsh measures of general and indiscriminate vengeance.' (1)

Agreeing with the Government of India, the Court of Directors observed that the burning of Naga villages was 'highly objectionable in every point of view' and they described these measures as 'a barbarous system of retaliation' and said that this would 'render the pacification of the Nagas utterly hopeless.' (2)

The Governor of Bengal wrote to Jenkins that though the Government was aware of the difficulties in bringing the Naga offenders who murdered the sepoys to justice, still 'a judicious display of military force, combined with negociation' might prove successful. (3) But Jenkins frankly admitted that he was unable to hold out much prospect of catching the offenders because of the great extent of the forests and the difficulty of supervision over such remote areas. (4) However, to catch hold

(1) Ibid, No. 101,978, p.83.
The Government of India to Jenkins, 23 May 1845.

(2) Political Letters to India, 12 August 1846, No.24, Vol.II.

(3) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 30 July 1845, No. 250. The Bengal Government to Jenkins, 30 July, 1845.

(4) Bengal Criminal Judicial Constultations, 10 December 1845, No. 150.
Jenkins to the Bengal Government, 1 November 1845.

of the guilty Nagas, in 1846 Captain Butler, the Principal Assistant visited the Naga hills and he was received by all the Naga chiefs with 'great friendliness'. The chiefs of every village presented him tribute of elephant's tusks, cloths and spears according to their means. Butler demanded the surrender of the guilty Nagas who murdered the British sepoy, but the chiefs declared that it was not in their power to do so. Butler considered it prudent not to pursue the matter any further. He however made the chiefs promise that they would no more be at feuds with each other.⁽¹⁾ To civilize the Nagas, Butler now suggested the establishment of schools in the Naga hills.

The Government of India expressed its satisfaction over Butler's proceedings and authorized a monthly outlay of seventeen rupees to start a school at Hosing Haju for the instruction of Naga boys.⁽²⁾ Jenkins was informed that 'the utmost that could for many years be expected to be accomplished towards ameliorating the condition of the Naga tribes is to create such a respect for our power as will restrain them from preying upon one another and our own more peaceable subjects, and to encourage by all means

(1) India Political Consultations, 23 May 1846, No.31.
Journal of Captain Butler, 16 January 1846.

(2) Nothing, however, was heard of this school later on.

their intercourse with the more settled population of the plains by giving them motives for it on their part in the profit and advantage which they may derive from bringing the produce of their industry to barter for articles which they want and which are duly to be had in the markets of the low country. (1)

Butler's visit to the Naga hills seemed to produce fruitful results. In 1848 1043 Angami Nagas visited Nowgong and bought 1600 Rupees worth of beads and 350 Rupees worth of salt, and the 'utmost goodwill' was manifested towards the authorities and the people of the plains. (2)

In 1849 the Government's relation with the Nagas suddenly deteriorated. In July of the same year two Naga chiefs of Mozumah Nilholey and Jubeli were fighting with each other. The native superintendent of the Naga tribes Bhogchand went to Mozumah to settle their quarrels, and he was received cordially by both chiefs. Bhogchand now demanded of Nilholey the surrender of his followers who had killed one of Jubeli's tribe. Nilholey refused and replied

(1) India Political Consultations, 23 May 1846, No.32.
The Government of India to Jenkins, (n.d.)

(2) India Political Consultations, 17 November 1849, No.161.
Butler to Jenkins, 9 October 1849.
Also Mills - Report on Assam, Appendix M - Angami Naga Rebellion, p.clii.

that he could not submit to such a dishonourable act. He then requested Bhogchand that both he and Jubeli should be taken to Nowgong, and he would gladly abide by the decision of Captain Butler. But Bhogchand did not pay any heed to Nilholey's requests, and apprehended two of his followers. Nilholey then considered that Bhogchand had sided with Jubeli, and left Mozumah with all his followers, which was tantamount to a declaration of war. Jubeli now warned Bhogchand that he would be attacked, but Bhogchand, to show his contempt for the enemy, slept in a hut without cover, and the same night he and thirteen sepoy were murdered by Nilholey.⁽¹⁾

Jenkins now recommended an expedition under Lieutenant Vincent to arrest Nilholey.⁽²⁾ The Government of India expressed 'much regret' at the continuance of 'deadly feuds' among the Nagas, and declared that because of the murder of Bhogchand and the sepoy it

(1) India Political Consultations, 17 November 1849, No.158
Butler to Jenkins, 14 August 1849
Also, Mills - Report on Assam, Appendix M - Angami
Naga Rebellion, p.clii

(2) India Political Consultations, 17 November 1849, No.160.
Jenkins to the Government of India, 19 October 1849.

was 'imperatively necessary that immediate and severe measures' be taken to convince the tribes that such acts of outrage could not be committed with impunity. The Government admitted that their endeavours to induce these tribes to live quietly and peaceably had failed, and so the Agent was given a wide discretion to adopt measures of the most stringent and decisive type. He was also informed that 'as far as it might be possible, no village should be burnt, nor the crops of any village destroyed, except those which he might himself point out to be dealt with, in the event of a non-compliance by the clans to whom they might belong, with the demands which he might consider it necessary to make upon them for the surrender of those who were known to have been concerned in attacks upon our subjects.' (1)

In accordance with these instructions an expedition was sent to the Naga hills under Lieutenants Vincent and Campbell, but it ended in failure. After the initial

(1) India Political Consultations, 17 November 1849,
No. 171.

The Government of India to Jenkins, 17 November 1849.

setbacks, however, Vincent again proceeded to Mozumah and burnt down an enemy village.⁽¹⁾ The Government of India, however, took a strong view of the burning of this village, and described it as 'a very unnecessary and wanton piece of severity'.⁽²⁾ Lord Dalhousie stated that he formed 'a very unfavourable impression of the manner in which the interests of the Government were attended to, and its affairs conducted by the officer in charge of the N. E. Frontier'. He also said that he viewed the burning of the village 'with great dissatisfaction'.⁽³⁾

The consequences of the burning of the village were as was to be expected. In the beginning, Nilholey had only 160 followers, but after this incident his followers increased to 860, and 5,360 warriors of different

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- (1) India Political Consultations, 21 March 1851, No.245.
Jenkins to the Government of India, 25 February 1851
 - (2) India Political Consultations, 21 March 1851, No.250.
The Government of India to Jenkins, 21 March 1851
 - (3) India Political Consultations, 28 March 1851, No.4.
The Government of India to Jenkins, 28 March 1851.

villages were arrayed against British troops.⁽¹⁾

However, in December 1850 the British troops occupied the enemy village of Konoma.⁽²⁾ Nilholey and his followers left Konoma before its capture.

But though the British troops won a victory, Captain Reid, the officer commanding, now declared that the troops should not be stationed at Mozumah, as the friendly Nagas could not be trusted, and there was not 'the slightest chance' of securing the enemy.⁽³⁾

Captain Butler urged the immediate and complete withdrawal of the troops from the hills, as, according to him, the Government's interference in the internal feuds of the Nagas was a complete failure, and that the friendly Nagas had no further claims to protection, as their enemies had been defeated. He also said that the cost of occupation of the hills would be 'enormous'.

(1) Mills - Report on Assam, Appendix M - Angami Naga Rebellion, p.clvii.

(2) India Political Consultations, 21 March 1851, No.255. Major Foquet Commanding 2nd Assam Light Infantry to The Adjutant General of the Army, 12 December 1850.

(3) India Political Consultations, 21 March 1851, No.237. Captain Reid, Commanding troops in Naga Hills, to Jenkins, 11 January 1851.

He held that the Government had 'no alternative but to adopt a strictly defensive policy for the future.' (1)

Jenkins, however, held that the Government could not 'with any regard to humanity' avoid interfering in Naga affairs. Besides, the withdrawal of British troops would lead to the entire destruction of the friendly tribe of Mozumah. So he suggested that the troops should be stationed in the Naga Hills to prevent further outrages. (2)

Lord Dalhousie in his minute of 20 February 1851 adopted the course proposed by Butler. He declared that 'I dissent entirely from the policy which is recommended of what is called obtaining a control, that is to say of taking possession of these hills and of establishing our sovereignty over their savage inhabitants. Our possession could bring no profit to us; and would be as costly to us as it would be unproductive'. He held that the plundering inroads of the Nagas could 'more easily, more cheaply

(1) India Political Consultations, 7 February 1851, No.203. Butler to Jenkins, 26 December 1850.

(2) India Political Consultations, 7 February 1851, No.201. Jenkins to the Government of India, 2 January 1851.

and more justly' be obtained by adopting an effective means of defence on the line of the frontier. He said that as the enemy had now been defeated, it was now up to the friendly Nagas 'to maintain the ground which is now its own'. He noted that the position of the European officer and of the troops in the hills was 'far from satisfactory', the troops were 'so isolated' and the friendly Nagas could not be relied upon for supplies. He observed that the Government had 'no wish for territorial aggrandisement, and no designs on the independence of the Naga tribes'. He said that the Government's future policy should be 'to confine ourselves to our own ground - protect it as it can and must be protected - not meddle in the feuds or fights of these savages, encourage trade with them as long as they are peaceful towards us, and rigidly exclude them from all communication either to sell what they have got or to buy what they want if they should become turbulent or troublesome'.⁽¹⁾

(1) India Political Consultations, 28 March 1851, No.1.
Lord Dalhousie's Minute, 20 February 1851.

Accordingly, all the troops were withdrawn from the Naga hills in March 1851, giving the friendly Nagas the option of relying solely on their own means of defence, or of settling in British territory.

The Court of Directors, agreeing with Lord Dalhousie, observed that 'our interference in the internal feuds of these savages was an error, and that we ought to have been satisfied with compelling them to forbear from attacks on our own subjects or those of our allies'.⁽¹⁾

But the withdrawal of the troops made the Nagas bolder, and as Naga honour demanded revenge upon the enemy, outrages upon the British subjects now became frequent.

In the beginning of 1854, it was reported that an army of 1,500 Manipuris had invaded the Angami country, poured down on the village of Mozumah and burnt down every house with grains and other goods.

(1) Political Letters to India, 4 June 1851, No.18, Vol.16.

Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, the Sub-Assistant Commissioner, informed Jenkins that these Nagas now came down to seek the protection of the Government, and declared that they embraced nearly one-half of the Angami country and were fully convinced 'of the vast advantages which our system of administration possesses over that of the Munnipoorees'. Anandaram, therefore, advocated that 'the subjugation of these hill tribes appears to be likewise the only means by which we can effectively protect our subjects in the plains and prevent the frequent inroads of the savage tribes on them'. According to Anandaram all attempts of the Government to put an end to Naga outrages had failed, the policy of pacifying them by giving presents, the measure of burning down their villages were equally of no avail. He therefore concluded that 'without subjecting the hill tribes to our immediate control, and thereby introducing among them peaceful habits, it would be both fruitless and vain to entertain any hopes of affording security and protection to our unwarlike and defenceless subjects of the plains'.⁽¹⁾

(1) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 29 April 1854, No.747.
Anandaram to Jenkins, 21 March, 1854.

But the Government stuck to its defensive policy and the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal instructed Jenkins to scrupulously avoid interfering in the internal feuds of the Nagas, and asked him to desist from 'all mixing up of the Government with the concerns and the interests of the Naga tribes'.⁽¹⁾

Mills, supporting this policy of non-interference, said that trade should be encouraged with the Nagas. He hoped that with the increase of trade 'we shall....by stopping the trade, have greater power in punishing them, and by tact, in time we may induce them to surrender delinquents, whereas to capture them by military expeditions is perfectly impossible'.⁽²⁾ Accordingly, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal wrote to Jenkins that if the Nagas desired to resort to British territories for trade, they would be well received.⁽³⁾

Fortunately at this time there was a favourable turn in the Government's relations with the Nagas.

(1) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 14 June 1855, No.185.
The Bengal Government to Jenkins, 17 May 1854.

(2) Mills - Report on Assam, p.49.

(3) Bengal Judicial Proceedings 8 March 1855, No. 163.
The Bengal Government to Jenkins, 2 March 1855.

In 1854 Jenkins reported that twenty Angami lads had applied to be enlisted in the Nowgong Police Militia Company.⁽¹⁾ He said that 'I feel myself persuaded, that they are generally desirous of being taken completely under the protection of our Government, as the only possible way of putting down that state of insecurity in which all are involved at present, from the prevalence of innumerable and endless feuds, which must be revenged if not settled, by adjudication of a superior power'.⁽²⁾ The Lieutenant Governor sanctioned the measure of enlistment of the twenty Angami Nagas to the Nowgong Police Militia, and the grant of subsistence allowance to each of these recruits, until brought on the strength of the Company.⁽³⁾

This experiment of employing Angami Nagas as sepoy had proved 'highly successful'.⁽⁴⁾ The Nagas visiting North Cachar, instead of wandering about from village to village as before, now had a

(1) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 22 June 1854, No.158
Jenkins to the Bengal Government, 29 May 1854.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Bengal Judicial Proceedings 22 June 1854, No.159
The Bengal Government to Jenkins, 17 June 1854.

(4) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 27 September 1855, No.399.
Lieutenant Bivar, Assistant Agent to Jenkins, 25 July 1855.

definite object in visiting their friends and clansmen. Besides, the presence of one or two Angamis at military outposts gave confidence to the guard. The local authorities hoped that the Angami Nagas employed as sepoy would act as hostages for the faith and goodwill of their clansmen. (1)

In 1855 Jenkins reported that the measure of giving a subsistence allowance for twenty Angami Nagas to be trained as recruits appeared to be 'very gratifying', and he therefore proposed that further employment should be given to the hill tribes. He held that 'it may be premature to enlist them as yet for the local Regiment without a further experience of their behaviour as soldiers, but it seems certain that our great chance of civilizing them and bringing them under our control is by providing, as far as practicable, some sufficient employment for the young men, who otherwise left to their own resources would think of nothing but predatory incursions upon their neighbours'. (2)

(1) Ibid.

(2) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 27 September 1855, No. 399. Jenkins to the Bengal Government, 7 August 1855.

The Lieutenant Governor sanctioned the proposal of enlisting ten more Angami lads into the Nowgong Police Militia, and the granting of two rupees per month as subsistence allowance to them. He suggested that the levy of a small force composed of Nagas under an European officer 'might prove at once the cheapest and the most effectual measure of protecting our frontier from Naga incursion[s] while such men, as the Nagas..... would assuredly be of great use in any general service that might at any time be required on the Assam Frontier'.⁽¹⁾ The Government of India approved of the enlistment of the Angamis into the Nowgong Police Militia.⁽²⁾

But meanwhile, Naga outrages continued as before. Jenkins again urged upon the Bengal Government of the necessity of annexing the Naga country. He also held that it was only by their becoming Hindus or Christians that they would give up their bloodthirsty habits.⁽³⁾ But the Lieutenant Governor declared that the Government would stick to its policy of non-interference

(1) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 27 September 1855, No.400.
The Bengal Government to Jenkins, 18 September 1855.

(2) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 1 November 1855, No.161.
The Government of India to the Bengal Government,
26 October 1855.

(3) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 14 June 1855, No.186.
Jenkins to the Bengal Government, 5 June 1854.

and he reprimanded Jenkins for not giving sufficient attention to translating this policy into practice.⁽¹⁾

Jenkins now instructed Lieutenant Bivar, the Assistant Agent in charge of North Cachar, to devise effective means of defence on the line of the frontier, and to adopt any measures which he might consider expedient for the better protection of the Assamese villages from Naga aggressions.⁽²⁾ Bivar reported that the protection of so extended a line of frontier was very difficult and expensive, and the Nagas travelled through the forests 'as stealthily and safely as tigers'. On the subject of organizing a system of patrols, Bivar remarked that such a measure might prove beneficial, but even then it must be remembered that they had to deal with 'a wily enemy who avoid beaten paths when bent on outrage- on such occasions they travel through the forests on the tracks of wild animals, Elephants, Buffaloes, and the like, their movements are rapid, they detach scouts and make sure of their prey before they

(1) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 14 June 1855, No.194.
The Bengal Government to Jenkins, 29 November 1854.

(2) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 14 June 1855, No.197.
Jenkins to Bivar, 9 December 1854.

pounce upon it'. He further said that however effective the means of defence might be, the independent and warlike Angami Nagas would regard it as weakness on the part of the Government, and 'each successful inroad will encourage boldness and render our frontier villages more and more insecure'. (1)

Between March 1854 and April 1856 the Angami Nagas committed twelve unprovoked aggressions and killed ninety-one British subjects, wounded fourteen, carried four into captivity and burnt every village they entered. (2) Bivar opined that the Angamis were becoming 'more and more dangerous', and he urged that 'unless firm and decided measures calculated to ensure the chastisement of offenders are speedily adopted, this growing spirit of rapine and bloodshed may give rise to incalculable mischief'. He advocated an expedition into the guilty villages in the cold season. (3)

But Jenkins replied that because of the Government's determined policy to take up a defensive

(1) Bengal Judicial proceedings, 8 March 1855, No.158.
Bivar to Jenkins, 4 January 1855.

(2) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 18 September 1856, No.265
Bivar to Jenkins, 22 June 1856.

(3) Ibid.

attitude towards the tribes, he would not recommend the proposed expedition. However, he said that all the tribes in North Cachar, the Cacharis, the Mikirs, and the Arung Nagas were so much ravaged by the Angamis that they could no more defend themselves, and were only preparing for flight. According to Jenkins, 'we cannot, I fear, but be certain that the Anghamis will follow up our retreating villages wherever they venture to, even if they will fly beyond Jumoonah and the Dyung River, there will be no end to the progress of desolation unless we can bring up settlers of another stamp and interpose them between the people of North Cachar and the Anghamee Nagas'.⁽¹⁾ He therefore suggested that the Khasias and the Kukis should be induced to settle in these territories. Jenkins opined that they were all practised bowmen, a weapon which the Nagas dreaded. He said that free lands should be given to these tribes to settle in the deserted districts of the Dhansiri river with the prospect of total exemption from taxation for a long period, not less

(1) Ibid. Jenkins to Bivar, 29 July 1856.

than twenty years. Jenkins also suggested that if they succeeded in establishing flourishing villages 'in the fine and fertile country, we are now abandoning', they should be assisted with small guards of sepoy and gifts of firearms and ammunition. He concluded that 'the more they were accustomed to trust entirely to themselves the more fitted would they become for the position they would take up, and the more effectually would our purpose of defending the frontier by the means of these warlike tribes be fulfilled'.⁽¹⁾

Accordingly, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal declared himself against another expedition against the Nagas, and approved of the measure of settling Kuki emigrants for the protection of the frontier.⁽²⁾

In 1856 Jenkins reported that two influential Nagas from the hostile villages came to him begging forgiveness for their past misdeeds. They said that they were hostile to the Government because of thair

(1) Ibid.

(2) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 18 September 1856, No.268.
The Bengal Government to Jenkins, 12 September 1856.

burning of a village in 1851. Jenkins hoped that this would⁽¹⁾ bring to a happy termination the series of incursions to which our unfortunate border villages have lately been subject to, and open brighter prospects for the Hill District of North Cachar'.⁽¹⁾

But the Lieutenant Governor took a different view of the matter. He declared that the Government did not want the allegiance of the 'savages', and asked Jenkins 'to discourage all attempts on the part of your subordinate officers to mix up the Government with any of the proceedings of the independent Naga tribes'.⁽²⁾

Jenkins now suggested that with regard to the future protection of the frontier villages, they should rely on the Rengma Nagas, by supplying them with muskets and stipends. He also said that the personal contact of the European officers with the Rengmas would be attended with 'beneficial results on the temper of the Hillmen'.⁽³⁾ The Lieutenant

(1) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 26 December 1856, No.120
Jenkins to the Bengal Government, 23 November 1856.

(2) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 26 December 1856, No.121
The Bengal Government to Jenkins, 11 December 1856

(3) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 31 December 1857, No.180.
Jenkins to the Bengal Government 28 May 1857.

Governor approved of these measures.⁽¹⁾

But Naga outrages continued as before, and at last the Angami country was formed into a district in 1866, with headquarters at Samaguting. In 1878 this place was abandoned in favour of Kohima. In that year an expedition was undertaken against the Angamis, and each of the thirteen villages that entered into a coalition was either occupied or destroyed. Since that time the Angamis behaved peacefully.

As with the Nagas, the Government also had many difficulties in dealing with the Bhutias. The Bhutias, as we have seen, were greatly dependent on the plains for their supplies. In the Bhutan frontier there were eighteen passes or Duars, (eleven on the frontiers of Bengal and Cooch Behar, and seven on that of Assam), which had been surrendered to the Bhutias by the old Ahom Government.

As the Bhutias gave constant trouble to the Assamese living in these Duars, so in 1841 the

(1) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 31 December 1857, No.181A.
The Bengal Government to Jenkins, 24 July 1857.

Government occupied the whole of the Assam Duars, as the only means of securing tranquillity for that part of the frontier. The Government also decided that a sum of Rupees 10,000 should annually be paid to the Bhutan Government, as compensation for the loss of revenue entailed on them by the resumption.⁽¹⁾

The Bhutias, however, could never reconcile themselves to the surrender of the Duars, which were economically so valuable to them. The authorities of Bhutan - the Deb and the Dharma Rajahs - claimed the restoration of the Duars. But in 1845 the Court of Directors finally ruled that the claims of the Bhutias were 'quite inadmissible, the permanent assumption of the Dooars having been deliberately and most justifiably resolved on, and nearly all the present inhabitants having settled in the Dooars on the faith of assurances to that effect'. The Directors held that one-third of the present net revenue would be more than the Bhutias had received from the Duars, and that if paid in money, it could

(1) Mills - Report on Assam, Appendix M, p.xci
Captain Rowlatt, Principal Assistant Commissioner
of Kamrup to Mills, 20 June 1853.

easily be exchanged by them for the articles of produce of the low country which they required. They also expressed satisfaction over 'the great and rapid improvements of the Doars since our Government was extended over them'.⁽¹⁾

For the next nine years, the areas adjoining the Bhutan hills enjoyed comparative peace.⁽²⁾

This period of peace, however, proved to be of short duration, for in 1853 it was reported that owing to the quarrels of the great chieftains regarding the appointment of the Deb Rajah, the whole country of Bhutan was 'in a state of civil war and anarchy'.⁽³⁾

Two years later, the Bhutias were committing murders and dacoities on British subjects, so Jenkins ordered the passes to be closed, and an additional military guard was being posted on the frontier.⁽⁴⁾ He also addressed a remonstrance to the Dewangiri Rajah against the Bhutia outrages.

(1) India Political Letters sent, 15 January 1845. No 1.

(2) Captain Rowlatt reported in 1853 that since the occupation of the Duars no violence had been offered to the people in the plains by the Bhutias. He also said that during the cold weather they frequented the plains for trade, and an annual pilgrimage was made to the Haju temple near Gauhati. (Mills - Report on Assam, Appendix M, p.xcii. Rowlatt to Mills, 20 June 1853.

(3) Ibid, p.cxxiv.

(4) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 19 July 1855, No.219. Jenkins to the Bengal Government, 21 April 1855.

At this time, the Dharma Rajah, who had been deprived of his property and seal by the rebellious subahs, was willing to surrender the Bengal Duars to the British Government and put himself under its protection. But Lord Dalhousie had already, with reference to the Nagas, declared in 1851 that the Government would confine its duty to defending the frontiers. This policy was applied to the Bhutias also. In 1855 the Government of India declared that it did not 'desire to interfere in the internal disputes of Bootan, or to take the Dhurm Rajah under its protection'. It also ordered that a demand should be made upon the Bhutan Government for the surrender of offenders.⁽¹⁾

Instead of surrendering the offenders, the Bhutias carried off another British subject in 1856. The Government of India instructed the Bengal Government 'to demand from them the punishment of the offenders, and an apology for the acts of their dependents, and to give them warning (already fully authorized) that, if atonement is not made for this new aggression, the

(1) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 10 May 1855, No.224.
The Government of India to the Bengal Government,
4 May 1855.

Government of India will hold itself free to take permanent possession of the Bengal Doars'.⁽¹⁾

This policy of the Government yielded fruitful results. The Bhutia chiefs, being afraid of losing the Bengal Duars, tendered their apologies for their previous misconduct.

But inspite of this, Bhutia outrages continued. So in 1857 the Government of India declared that if the Bhutan authorities failed to behave well, the Government should permanently occupy the tract of the country on the British side of the Tista river which was ceded to them seventy years ago. This, the Government observed, 'can be effected.....without any risk to the health of the troops and others engaged in the measure, and without embarrassing ourselves with holding and defending an inhospitable country, such as the Doars close under the Bootan hills'.⁽²⁾

Thus this uneasy state continued, till in 1864 the Government had to undertake an expedition,

(1) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 18 September 1856, No.240.
The Government of India to the Bengal Government,
25 June 1856.

(2) Bengal Public Consultations, 10 September 1857, No.129.
The Government of India to the Bengal Government,
14 April 1857.

which succeeded after what Gait later called a 'needless slaughter of the Bhutias'. After this the Bengal Duars were annexed to the British territory, and a total sum of Rs.25,000 was paid to the Bhutias. After that they behaved peacefully.

The Mishmis, also, were a source of trouble to the Government. Living in inaccessible hills with slender means of subsistence, they carried depredations on British subjects, and the Government undertook measures of chastisement where peaceful methods failed. The British authorities directly came into contact with the Mishmis in 1854, when they murdered two French missionaries and plundered their properties on the immediate frontier of Tibet. Jenkins wrote to the Bengal Government that though the missionaries were not British subjects, yet the hill men would consider that they were English, or connected with them. He therefore suggested that a handsome reward of 1,000 rupees should be granted to anyone who would apprehend the Mishmi chief, Kai-e-sah, which would show the Government's 'great dissatisfaction at such crimes'.⁽¹⁾

(1) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 25 May 1855, No.213
Jenkins to the Bengal Government, 29 November 1854.

The Government of India wrote to the Bengal Government that the Agent should be authorized to offer a reward of 1,000 Rupees, or even a larger sum, as might be thought requisite, and he was to be instructed to 'set on foot the most vigorous measures which the means at his disposal may permit, to secure the detention and capture of the offenders, whoever they may be'. Jenkins was also to be told that should the offenders be found to be amenable to British jurisdiction, they should be punished with the utmost severity that the law allowed. Should the offenders be found to be the subjects of the Tibetan Government, the Agent should call upon its representative on the border to take appropriate measures. Lastly, if the guilty Mishmis were neither British nor Tibetan subjects, or they being British subjects should evade punishment, Jenkins was to be authorized to 'raze the villages of the offending clan to the ground, to drive off all the cattle belonging to them, and to lay waste their cultivation', leaving, however, the property of unoffending clans or tribes uninjured.⁽¹⁾

(1) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 25 May 1855, No.216.
The Government of India to the Bengal Government,
5 January 1855.

Soon, however, the Mishmi chief, Kai-e-sah, who was responsible for the crime, was captured, and to cultivate the goodwill and to encourage the fidelity of the wild tribes, the Government of India suggested the presentation of some gifts to the loyal chiefs.⁽¹⁾

Next year two ryots in Sadiya were murdered by some Mishmis whose main object was plunder and kidnapping.⁽²⁾ Captain Dalton declared that, as there was no positive proof as to the actual perpetrators of the outrages, the authorities could do nothing 'but to look upon all as enemies, who will not on our own terms be friends. We must make it the interest of all to restrain these savage and cowardly thieving and murderous incursions, whilst we give every encouragement to visits for the purpose of honest trade and barter'.⁽³⁾ The Lieutenant Governor of Bengal approved of this suggestion.⁽⁴⁾

(1) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 9 August 1855, No.169. The Secretary to the Government of India to the officiating Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department, 6 June 1855.

(2) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 10 January 1856, No.245. Dalton to Jenkins, 19 December 1855.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 10 January 1856, No.246. The Bengal Government to Jenkins, 9 January 1856.

This policy of intimidation seemed to bear fruit, for in 1856 several Mishmi chiefs, with many of their followers, met Jenkins bringing hill commodities with them for barter, requiring salt in return. Jenkins noted that 'the Luckimpore Division surpasses all the other divisions of Assam in the richness of its soil and climate, for a varied culture of the most valuable products, though it is lamentably deficient in population; but it is being slowly recruited from the hill races, and much of its future prosperity must depend upon this resource; and hence the high importance of our keeping on good terms with all these barbarous races, and this can only be secured by a proper resentment of all their aggressions. These must first be put down before we can establish any amicable relations with them.....'.⁽¹⁾ Jenkins further said, that the Rev. Higgs, a missionary, had considerable influence over the Mishmis, and they looked upon him as a friend and benefactor, so he could be depended upon to establish amity with them. The

(1) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 21 February 1856, No.123.
Jenkins to the Bengal Government, 18 January 1856.

Lieutenant Governor expressed his gratification at the successful attempts of Dalton and Higgs to 'bring about a confidential intercourse with the frontier tribes and a proper control over them'.⁽¹⁾

But the Government did not find it so easy to conciliate the Mishmis, and in 1857 further outrages were reported. With regard to the measures to be adopted against the guilty Mishmis, Lieutenant Colonel Hannay, Commanding 1st Assam Light Infantry Battalion, reported that the Mishmis lived on jungle roots, and fish and game, for months. He said that 'the country is quite unknown to anyone in the plains, and without assistance and guidance from others of the same tribe... I see not the slightest chance of success'. Hannay therefore proposed that every means should be taken, through friendly tribes, to gain information which would enable the Government to make a foray upon the Mishmis when they least expected it.⁽²⁾

Jenkins agreed with Hannay and opined that 'under present circumstances I should consider it better

(1) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 21 February 1856, No.125
The Bengal Government to Jenkins, 12 February 1856.

(2) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 16 July 1857, No.170
Hannay to Jenkins, 11 February 1857.

to defer any such operations and content ourselves with remaining on the defensive and taking such measures for organizing a Police of Kamtis as might appear necessary'.⁽¹⁾
⁽²⁾
 The Lieutenant Governor approved of this policy.

In 1866 a local Khamti militia was created by giving one rupee to all members of this tribe who would settle along this section of the frontier. This measure proved successful.~~given by the Mishmis.~~

The Government also faced many difficulties in dealing with the Garos. If the Mishmis faced a precarious economic position in their rocky hills and made plundering inroads in the plains, the Garos, on the other hand, committed⁽³⁾ murders for the sake of human skulls. In June 1845 they⁽⁴⁾ carried away a woman's head for their religious ceremonies.

To gain a personal knowledge of the Garo country, Jenkins made a tour of the frontier, and in 1846, in a letter to the Bengal Government, made several important

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- (1) Bengal Judicial Proceedings 10 September 1857, No.120.
Jenkins to the Bengal Government, 14 August 1857.
 - (2) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 10 September 1857, No.123
The Bengal Government to Jenkins, 4 September 1857.
 - (3) Mills - Report on Assam, Appendix M, p.cxix
Jenkins to Mills, 4 June 1853.
 - (4) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 30 July 1845, No.247
Major Matthie, the Deputy Commissioner of Assam to the Bengal Government, 19 June 1845.

points. First, he had been met by all the Garo chiefs who were in submission to the Government, and they professed themselves ready to obey all commands of the Government. Secondly, the hostile attitude of the Garos was mainly due to the Government's trusting too much to native agency in its intercourse with them to the neglect of direct personal contact by the European officers. Thirdly, the lack of any information regarding their tribes and places and the Government's failure to do anything towards the improvement of their condition also led to the alienation of the Garos. Fourthly, in all respects the Garos were at the lowest stage of civilization, and there was no immediate hope of changing their attitudes and superstitions, except through the means of education. Lastly, Jenkins concluded that 'until therefore the feelings of the Garos are altered, we have no dependence except on punishment, in restraining them from these cruelties. But if the border chiefs were really in earnest in endeavouring to prevent these outrages, it is nearly

impracticable for them to do anything from the nature of the country and the facility with which the Garrows can wander for days in the jungles for their victims'.⁽¹⁾

The Deputy Governor of Bengal approved of the policy of increasing personal contact of the European officers with the Garos.⁽²⁾

Accordingly, Dalton made a tour of the Garo country and declared that 'so long as they firmly believe that in the commission of the most cold blooded assassination they are only honoring their dead or paying obedience to the moralities of their gods, it will be difficult wholly to check these atrocities'. To civilize the Garos, he suggested the establishment of schools.⁽³⁾ Accordingly, as with the case of the Nagas, the Government of India granted fifty rupees per month for the starting of a school in the Garo hills.⁽⁴⁾

- (1) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 11 March 1846 No.185. Jenkins to the Bengal Government, 3 February 1846,
- (2) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 11 March 1846, No.186. The Bengal Govt^{to} to Jenkins, 11 March 1846.
- (3) India Political Consultations, 17 July 1847, No.23. Dalton to Jenkins, 17 June 1847.
- (4) India Political Consultations, 18 September 1847, No.34. The Government of India to Jenkins, 18 September 1847.

But this project of the school did not seem to be very successful, for in 1853 there were only eight boys in the Garo school.⁽¹⁾

Further outrages compelled the Government to adopt drastic measures. Lord Dalhousie, in a minute in 1852, laid down several principles of policy. First, all written engagements with the Garos were a mockery, and therefore none should be made with them. Secondly, a force should be sent to the place of outrage, a fine should be exacted and some of the chiefs or their children should be taken to Goalpara as hostages. Thirdly, if the Garos refused to pay the fine and proved to be recalcitrant, their villages and crops should be destroyed. The Governor-General observed that 'harsh as the measure is, it is better to have recourse to it than to permit our subjects in the plains to be butchered in scores by savages, who have not even the wild justification of revenge or plunder for their atrocities, but who commit them for purposes

(1) Mills - Report on Assam, vide - Gawalparra, p.8.

of the most brutal superstition'.⁽¹⁾

But the Court of Directors declared that as the Garos could not have the means of paying 'any but the most trifling fine', the Government should only demand the arrest of the guilty Garos, which, being refused, some of the chiefs should be retained until the offenders were surrendered. The Court, while admitting that the Garos were 'in all respects just as rude as when they first came under our Government, and as much attached to their sanguinary superstitions', reminded the Governor-General that 'the same difficulties have been experienced among tribes of a similar character in other parts of India, and that by the judicious exercise of personal ascendancy, those difficulties have been completely overcome, we allude not solely to the Bheels of Candeish, the Mhairs of Ajmere, and the not very distant tribes of the Bhagulpore Hills, but to the still more striking case of the Khoonds on the South-Western frontier - These

(1) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 20 January 1853, No.132
Lord Dalhousie's minute, 11 November 1852.

encouraging examples should be never absent from the minds of those of our officers who are brought into contact with savage tribes, and we recommend to your most serious consideration the adoption of the same course towards the inhabitants of the Garrow hills, which has been so fruitful of benefit in every case to which it has been applied'. The Directors, however, added that the guilty Garos must be punished and 'severe' measures should be undertaken for the purpose if found necessary. (1)

Meanwhile an expedition was sent into the Garo hills, and the British troops, being 'unable to hold any communication with the inhabitants', burnt down a village. Jenkins noted that 'there seems to be a more daring and more general spirit of contumacy amongst them now than there has been displayed of late years'. He again emphasized the difficulties of military movements in such a difficult and unhealthy country. He therefore suggested that the 'hats'

(1) Political Letters to India, 10 August 1853, No.31, Vol. 18.

(markets) should be closed to stop the Garos from having any contact with the plains.⁽¹⁾

The Governor of Bengal, in a minute, while approving of the burning of the village, disapproved of further military operations, which he considered, would involve a useless waste of life. He also instructed Jenkins to enforce rigidly the exclusion of the Garos from the plains, and concluded that he was 'aware that these measures may possibly inflict injury on the innocent as well as the guilty. This is to be regretted; but individual interests must yield to the public interests when there is, as in this case, no alternative'.⁽²⁾

Jenkins now submitted a report on the subject of improving the Government's relations with the Garos, and adopting measures for the amelioration of their conditions. He said that 'all attempts hitherto for their improvement may, I consider, be deemed to be total failures, owing in some measure to the limited scale on which any such attempts have been made and to their not having been steadily pursued'. As with the

(1) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 20 January 1853, No.134
Jenkins to the Bengal Government, 4 January 1853.

(2) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 20 January 1853, No.137
The Minute by the Governor of Bengal, 17 January 1853.

Nagas, he held that there was hardly any hope of reforming their habits unless they became Hindus or Christians. Jenkins suggested that the whole Garo country should be opened out 'to the utmost extent' of the Government's power.⁽¹⁾

But Mills differed from Jenkins. He held that unless a European officer could reside in the interior of the Garo hills, which it was not possible to do because of the deadly climate of the hills, the Government should not extend its authority 'over unprofitable hills'. He also said that there was 'nothing to be gained by occupying the country; the revenue that could be derived from it would not cover one-sixth of the cost of maintaining the Police force; the expense of Government would be considerable, and the loss of life in all probability appalling'.⁽²⁾

So, the idea of opening up the Garo hills was given up for the present. Up to the close of 1856 the Garos remained peaceful. In that year, however, Garo outrages again recommenced. The local authorities

(1) Mills - Report on Assam, Appendix M, p.cxvii
Jenkins to Mills, 4 June 1853.

(2) Mills - Report on Assam, p.45.

made many attempts to capture the offenders, but without success. At last in 1869 the Garo hills were formed into a separate district, with headquarters at Tura. Peaceful conditions, however, were established throughout the district only after 1872-73.

As with the Garos, the Government faced some difficulties in dealing with the Kukis. The Kukis raided the plains, but their object was thought to be 'not plunder, for which they have never been known to show any desire, but they kill and carry away the heads of as many human beings as they can seize, and have been known in one night to carry off fifty. These are used in certain ceremonies performed at the funerals of their Chiefs, and it is always after the death of one of their Rajahs that their incursions occur'.⁽¹⁾

The Government had to take serious note of the Kukis when, in January 1850, they killed three British subjects and carried away eight.⁽²⁾ Lieutenant Colonel

(1) Mills - Report on Assam, Appendix M, p.cxxxix.
Jenkins to Mills, 4 June 1853.

(2) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 6 February 1850, No.72. The Superintendent of Police, Lower Provinces to the Bengal Government, 24 January 1850

Lister, Political Agent, Khasia hills, enquired whether a force could penetrate into the Kuki country from the Chittagong district. But R. Torrens, the Commissioner of Revenue, 16 Division, observed that it would not be practicable for any force to do so. He regretted that so little was known as to the means or possibility of approach to the country of these tribes. He urged that in future the Government officers should gather more information regarding this part of the country.⁽¹⁾ The Deputy Governor of Bengal approved of this suggestion.⁽²⁾

Prospects seemed to brighten soon. In the same year one Kuki Rajah met Lister and agreed to live on terms of amity with the British Government. He promised not to molest or attack any of the British subjects in future, and in token of submission, presented an elephant's tusk to the Government.⁽³⁾ The Governor of Bengal expressed his satisfaction at the measures

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- (1) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 13 February 1850 No.137. Torrens to the Bengal Government, 15 January 1850.
- (2) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 13 February 1850, The Bengal Government to the Government of India, 23 January 1850. No.138.
- (3) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 15 January 1851, Lister to the Bengal Government 20 December 1850. No.121.

adopted by Lister for bringing about an amicable relation with the Kukis.⁽¹⁾

In 1852 three Kuki Rajahs came to visit Lieutenant Vincent, Junior Assistant Commissioner, and agreed to pay revenue in elephants' tusks, and promised to pay henceforth revenue of one rupee per house.⁽²⁾

The situation continued to improve, for after four years, in 1856, a large band of foreign Kukis met Jenkins and expressed their determination through their chief to immigrate to the British territories. Jenkins remarked that 'I have no doubt we shall soon find his visit repeated by others for purposes of traffic, his coming down so far appears to show an extension of information amongst the tribes on this range of hills and a perfect confidence in the Government'.⁽³⁾

If the Government faced difficulties in dealing with the Nagas, the Bhutias, the Mishmis, the Garos and, to some extent, with the Kukis, with the

- (1) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultation, 15 Jan. 1851, No. 122.
The Bengal Govt to Lister, 9 January 1851. ^{uary}ember
- (2) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 18 Nov. 1852, No. 123.
Vincent to Butler, 19 July 1852
- (3) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 2 January 1857, No. 20.
Jenkins to the Bengal Government, 25 November 1856.

Abors and the Daphlas, however, the Government's conciliatory policy was quite successful.

The Abors were in the habit of levying contributions on their low land, and less martial, neighbours of Assam, and resented any irregularity in their payment by predatory incursions and the capture of prisoners.⁽¹⁾ But until 1839 the British Government did not interfere in the exactions of the hill tribes. In 1839/40 the Government found out that 427 Abor and Daphla chiefs were entitled to 'posa' (contributions from the lowlanders) amounting to Rupees 4,933.2.1. Moreover, the Gli Ghasi Abors and the Miris (a comparatively peace-loving people) exacted their 'posa' from the Eastern Mehals of the Lakhimpur district, which was estimated to be Rs.249. 4. 2. distributed among forty-two chiefs.⁽²⁾ In 1839/40 to secure the good-will of the Abors, the Miris and the Daphlas, the Government recognized their right over the lowlanders and granted a remission of four annas per pura, or one-fourth of the assessment

(1) Lieutenant Wilcox - "Memoir of a Survey of Assam and the Neighbouring countries, executed in 1825-28" in Selection of Papers regarding the Hill Tracts between Assam and Burmah, p.12.

(2) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 20 July 1852, Dalton to Jenkins, 19 May 1852. No.127

on rupit rice land to those of them who continued to render their services to the hill people. (1)

But the Government could not tolerate the outrages committed by the Abors on the plains for long. In 1851 Captain Vetch, the Political Agent, Upper Assam, wrote to Jenkins that to put a stop to the depredations of the Abors he would not recommend military operations, for several reasons. First, the Police jurisdiction of the Government could scarcely be said to extend to the scene of these occurrences. Secondly, the gold washers themselves propitiated the Abors by presents. Lastly, all the hill tribes along the Northern frontier exacted contributions from the lowlanders of the adjoining plains. (2) Vetch recommended that the Abors be warned that such depredations on their part would no longer be tolerated, and that to cultivate a friendly intercourse with the Abors, traders should be encouraged to establish an annual market or fair on the banks of the river, with

(1) Ibid.

(2) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 30 April 1851,
No.167.
Vetch to Jenkins, 19 March 1851.

adequate military protection. Though it was true, he remarked, that the Abors had little to offer in exchange, nevertheless, as their population was quite large, trade might be expected to spring up and eventually find an opening into Tibet.⁽¹⁾ The Governor of Bengal approved of these measures.⁽²⁾

Vetch also proposed that the Miris living on the North bank of the Brahmaputra river should be taxed. There was a considerable trade going on between the Abors and the Miris. The latter imported from the former country munjit (a kind of plant), beads, big knives, cooking utensils of metal, slaves and wives. The Miris, on the other hand, supplied the Abors with cloth, salt, or any articles imported from Assam.⁽³⁾ Besides, the Miris acted as 'go betweens' between the Assamese and the Abors. The Abor chiefs, therefore, informed Vetch that they would face great difficulties in procuring provisions, if the Miris were taxed and the Abors deprived of their services.⁽⁴⁾

(1) Ibid

(2) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 30 April 1851,
No.168
The Bengal Government to Jenkins, 25 April 1851.

(3) Board's Collections, Vol.2140, No.101,978, p.148.
Dalton to Jenkins, 23 March 1845.

(4) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 4 March 1852,
Jenkins to the Bengal Government, 30 January 1850. No.127

Jenkins, therefore, instructed Vetch to abstain from any attempt to impose the proposed poll-tax. He said that as the Government had as yet no provision to exercise any regular jurisdiction over the districts in question, there could be, consequently, no means of enforcing the collection of the tax in case of resistance.⁽¹⁾

The Abors now pledged themselves not to molest the gold-washers carrying on operations in their hills if the tax on the Miris was abandoned. Vetch suggested that conciliatory expeditions should be undertaken annually to the Abor country, and a small guard should be stationed at the junction of the Dibong and the Brahmaputra, to prevent attempts of the Abors to cut off trading boats, proceeding up the river.⁽²⁾

While approving these measures, Jenkins made several comments. First, the Abors were the most numerous of the tribes on the frontier, and as their mountains were almost inaccessible, the Government should be 'most cautious how we engage in any measure

(1) Ibid.

(2) Ibid.

that might draw us into hostilities with them'. Secondly, the increase of traffic with the Abors through the annual deputation of an officer accompanied by the traders would give the Government a much greater command over them, for 'the stopping of the fair will.....be equivalent to a severe punishment and compel their attention to our requisitions'. Lastly, the increase of intercourse with the Abors would promote their immigration into the plains, and any accession of population in the deserted plains below their hills would be welcome by the Government. (1)

The Governor of Bengal expressed his satisfaction that the protection of the gold-washers was secured, and to avoid 'uncomfortable relations between our Government and the Abors' directed the Political Agent to abstain from imposing the proposed poll tax on the Miris. The Governor also approved

(1) Ibid.

of the proposal of posting a small guard at the mouth of the Dihong river and directed that an officer should proceed annually to meet the Abors.⁽¹⁾

But the question of the 'posa' remained unsettled. The Daphlas especially claimed full dues from their allotted lowlanders, whether they could pay it or not. In 1850 Jenkins observed that the privilege of the Daphlas to collect the 'posa' directly from the ryots 'exposes the ryots to great extortion besides involving a principle by no means desirable to be allowed to continue'. He therefore authorized Vetch 'to withhold the Posa from the Duphlas unless they choose to take the value in cash.....'.⁽²⁾ This yielded fruitful results. After two years, in 1852, the Court of Directors instructed the Government of India to make the commutation of these claims by a fixed money payment general and compulsory.⁽³⁾

Captain Dalton remarked that the system of allowing the hill tribes to levy 'posa' upon the

- (1) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 4 March 1852. The Bengal Govt to Jenkins, 4 March 1852. No.129
 (2) Bengal Criminal Judicial Cons. 21 August 1850, No.118. Jenkins to Vetch, 26 March 1850.
 (3) Bengal Criminal Judicial Cons., 8 April 1852, No.171. Extract from a Despatch from the Court of Directors in the Political Department, 14 January 1852, No.4.

ryots 'was humiliating and demoralizing to the Luckimpore ryots, expecially to the Bohoteas [porters], instead of despising the Hill savages they looked up to them [,] imbibed their superstitions [,] adopted many of their customs and were as servile as slaves to the chieftains who gave themselves the air of masters over those from whom they collected blackmail'.⁽¹⁾

To do away with this state of affairs, in 1852 the 'posa' was commuted into a fixed money payment.⁽²⁾

Dalton hoped that 'it is likely to prove advantageous to all parties [,] they spend the cash paid to them as soon as they receive it (which is all for the good of trade) and they seldom think of buying food with it they are thrown on their own resources [,] are thus tempted to work or to cultivate in the plains for their subsistence while living there, and this will eventually I think lead to their settling permanently in our territory'.⁽³⁾

(1) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 20 July 1852,
No.127

Dalton to Jenkins, 19 May 1852.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid.

Although several Abor and Daphla Chiefs at first raised strong objections to the commutation of the 'posa' into cash payments, they however, with few exceptions, appeared contented with the arrangement. Jenkins reported that some of the hill clans might permanently reside on the plains, and so until they brought the wastes under cultivation, stipends would be necessary to support them which could ultimately be recovered in whole or in part by rents for their lands.⁽¹⁾ Accordingly, the Governor of Bengal authorized Jenkins to continue to such hill tribes as might so locate themselves in the plains the same payment as they would under the commutation scheme have been entitled to, had they continued to reside in the hills.⁽²⁾

After this the Abors and the Daphlas behaved peacefully, and after three years Captain Dalton paid a visit to a clan of Abors on the Dihong and as a result 'a very friendly intercourse with

(1) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 20 July 1852
 No.126
 Jenkins to the Bengal Govt^{ernment}, 12 June 1852.

(2) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 20 July 1852
 No.128.
 The Bengal Government to Jenkins, 16 July 1852.

all these clans' was established.⁽¹⁾ The Abors were also induced to visit the Government stations of Saikhwah and Dibrugarh, for the purpose of barter for the first time. In 1855 Jenkins observed that 'the conciliatory measures now successfully carried out by Captain Dalton will.....effect an object long desired, and free intercourse between the Abor villages and our stations, and put an end to that mistrust between the Assamese and the Abors....⁽²⁾

(1) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 3 January 1856, No.131
Jenkins to the Bengal Government, 21 August 1855.

(2) Ibid.

Chapter IV

Judicial administration of Assam
1845 - 58

During the Ahom rule the administrative officers exercised judicial functions in Assam. Appeals, however, were made to the three provincial courts in which the Bar Barua, the Bar Phukon and the Sadiya Khowa Gohain presided. They had full jurisdiction in all cases, civil and criminal, but the power of inflicting death penalty was reserved to the king. Hamilton reports that 'in the Bara Boruya's court he receives all complaints verbally, and immediately gives some person orders to investigate the cause, and to report the truth, and the cause is always decided according to the report of the umpire'.⁽¹⁾ He also notes that bribery was very common, in his words 'in fact the possession of jurisdiction in police, and in civil and criminal....[affairs], without any salary or regular fees, is considered as a valuable and productive authority'.

(1) Hamilton - An Account of Assam, p.50.

The capital offences were treason, rape, arson, and voluntary abortion. Offenders were put to death in various manners, 'by cutting their throats, by empaling them, by grinding them between two cylinders, by sawing them asunder between two planks, by beating them with hammers, and by applying burning hoes to different parts until they die'.⁽¹⁾ The British, after their occupation of Assam in 1826, abolished the old methods of administration of justice and modes of punishment. Even Maniram Dewan, the leader of the Mutiny of 1857, admitted that 'by the stoppage of such cruel practices, as extracting the eyes, cutting off noses and ears, and the forcible abduction of virgins from their homes.....the British Government has earned for itself inestimable praise and renown'.⁽²⁾

The highest judicial authority in Assam was the Commissioner's Court, which extended its jurisdiction throughout the province. It had only an appellate jurisdiction from the decisions of the Assistant

(1) Ibid, p.49.

(2) Mills - Report on Assam, Appendix K, B, Maniram's petition, p.Lxvi.

Commissioner.

The court of the Principal Assistant Commissioner, which was equivalent to that of a zillah or city judge in Bengal, had power to try all suits, without any limitation regarding the amount involved in them. The Assistant, to whom all petitions of plaint were in the first instance presented, was to retain on his own file suits of property, moveable or immoveable, of a value exceeding one thousand rupees, but might refer suits for smaller amounts to the Sadr Amin or Munsif. The Sadr Amin had power to try all original suits not involving a larger amount of property than one thousand rupees; and also all cases of appeal from the decision of the Munsif. The Munsif had power to try and decide all suits not exceeding in value the sum of three hundred rupees.⁽¹⁾ An appeal could be made from the decision of a Principal Assistant to the Court of the Commissioner of Assam, or from his Court to the Sadr Dewani Adalat at the Presidency of Fort William.

(1) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations,
16 April 1851, No.22.
Major Matthie, the Deputy Commissioner of Assam
to Jenkins, 7 September 1847.

In the administration of criminal justice, the functionaries were the Commissioner with a Deputy Commissioner vested with the same powers in the trial of cases as the Commissioner, Principal Assistants, Junior Assistants, Sub-Assistants and Sadr Amins.

The Principal Assistant had power to try cases not exceeding three hundred rupees, and could pass sentence of imprisonment with labour for two years¹ and of imprisonment with labour for the additional term of one year in lieu of corporal punishment. The Junior Assistant could impose fines not exceeding one hundred rupees commutable to imprisonment for a period not exceeding twelve months. The Sub-Assistants and the Sadr Amins could only try cases referred to them by the Assistant in charge of the district, and could pass sentence of fine not exceeding fifty rupees commutable to imprisonment for six months. Appeals could be made from the decisions of the Principal Assistants to the Commissioner's court, and from him to the court of Nizamat Adalat.⁽¹⁾

(1) Ibid.

From 1837 to 1860 Assam was administered by a Code of rules known as the Assam Code of 1837. These were extracts from the Bengal Regulations, and it was stated that 'in all cases not specially provided for in.....rules, the Commissioner, his Assistants, and native functionaries, shall endeavour to conform, as nearly as the circumstances of the province of Assam will permit, to the provisions of the Regulations in force in the provinces subordinate to the Presidency of Fort William.....'. (1)

The new judicial organization brought many advantages to the people. As Anandaram noted, 'we are glad to observe that life and property are...secure in this country. Dacoity is seldom or never heard of in any of the districts of the Province.....The road to justice is likewise beset with less formidable difficulties'. (2)

But the judicial organization contained many defects.. Anandaram complained that 'sordid corruption' prevailed among 'the ministerial officers

(1) Bengal ^{judicial} Criminal Consultations, 16 April 1851, No.24
Matthie to Jenkins, 7 September 1847.

(2) A. Phookun - Observations etc. vide - Mills, Report on Assam, Appendix F. p.XXXI

of the courts'.⁽¹⁾ Let us now consider the truth of this criticism. The British Government, to quote Jenkins, 'to provide suitable employment for native gentlemen of high rank, who had been deprived of their situations' by its acquisition of the country, employed them native judges.⁽²⁾ Under the Ahom Government these officials were large slave proprietors. But the British Government released the slaves in 1843, and as a result, they were reduced to great distress. Besides, the Sadr Amins of Assam received a hundred rupees a month less than those of Bengal, and their pay was even lower than that paid to the police darogahs of Assam.⁽³⁾ Major Matthie, the Deputy Commissioner of Assam, observed that it had a 'disheartening effect' on the native judges. He noted that 'talent rank and honesty all so essentially requisite for a Civil Judge' could not be expected

(1) Ibid, p.xlvi

(2) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 11 May 1854, No.154.
Jenkins to the Sadr Court, 23 February 1854.

(3) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 18 February 1846
No.300. Matthie to Jenkins, 10 May 1845.

from them on such salaries. He therefore urged that all the native judges of Assam should be placed on the same footing as those of Bengal.⁽¹⁾ But the Deputy Governor of Bengal refused to sanction this, although he declared that he would 'be ready at a convenient time, to take into consideration the cases of any individuals who may be considered specially deserving of favor and distinction'.⁽²⁾

Again, the principal omlahs (officials) in most of the courts of Lower Assam were Bengalis. During the time of British occupation of Assam, they had to bring their own boats from Bengal as it was very difficult to procure suitable boats in Assam. As travelling in Assam was very expensive, and as the omlahs had to maintain the boats at the river banks even when they moved inland, they were paid a larger travelling allowance than that was paid in Bengal. Besides, like the native judges, their pay was 'much less' than those received by the officials of Bengal.⁽³⁾

(1) Ibid.

(2) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 18 February 1846, No.301. The Bengal Government to Jenkins, 18 February 1846.

(3) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 26 December 1850, No.7. Jenkins to the Sadr Board of Revenue, 10 Sept.1850.

But in 1850 the Bengal Government declared that 'the system of passing travelling allowances to Establishments for periods when they are not travelling as being highly irregular, be discontinued forthwith'.⁽¹⁾

The low salary of the officials might have been one cause of the state of corruption in the courts. Regarding native judges, however, during our period we find only one charge of bribery against Jadunath Saru Melia Rajah, the Sadr Amin of Sibsagar, and even this charge could not be proved. Jenkins suggested his removal from office and said that 'for habits acquired under a native Government of which he was one of the principal member[s], rendering him unsuited to the conduct of business and the control of his officers as required under our Government', he was not fit to hold his office.⁽²⁾ Accordingly, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal decided that he should be recommended to resign.⁽³⁾

(1) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 26 December 1850, No.10. The Bengal Government to the Sadr Board of Revenue, 24 December 1850.

(2) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 11 May 1854, No.154. Jenkins to the Sadr Court, 23 February 1854.

(3) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 11 May 1854, No.156. The Bengal Government to Jenkins, 11 May 1854.

As regards the lower officials, in 1848 four cases of embezzlement were reported against the Nazir of the Fouzdary court of Kamrup.⁽¹⁾ He was found to be guilty and convicted.⁽²⁾ In 1852 the Nazir of the Deputy Magistrate's court in Darrang was charged of embezzlement and was punished.⁽³⁾ In a contemporary Assamese novel we find another description how the native official was bribed with a golden ring by the defendant's party.⁽⁴⁾ An eye-witness of the time, Dutiram Hazarika, described how the omlahs

(1) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 20 September, 1848, No.201. Lieutenant Dalton, the Magistrate of Kamrup to Matthie, 7 March 1848

(2) Judicial Letters from Bengal, 7 December 1850, No.46, Vol.27.

(3) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 9 September 1852, No.108. Captain Reynolds, the Magistrate of Darrang to Matthie, 31 January 1852.

(4) S.Deka Borooah (Hemchandra Borooah) - Bahire Rong Song Bhitare Qua Bhaturi [all that glitters is not gold], p.30.

Though himself a high-class Brahmin, Hemchandra Borooah in this novel satirizes Hindu orthodoxy. He exposes the immoral practices of a Hindu priest, who professes to be religious, but secretly commits all sorts of immoral acts. Besides, in this novel we get a picture of Assamese social life in its many aspects.

encouraged the people to produce false witnesses by bribing them.⁽¹⁾ In 1856 the Principal Assistant Commissioner noted that the native omlahs encouraged litigation and adopted their measures 'with such nicety and cunning that it requires more than human power to detect them'.⁽²⁾

Anandaram complained that the police were wholly inefficient to preserve the lives and property of the people. In his words 'that sordid corruption which prevails among the ministerial officers of the Courts prevails equally among the darogahs. Their love of gain often leads them actually to sell justice for money, and to lend their co-operation in the perpetration of injury and oppression on the poor and helpless.....When a poor ryot is put to duress or extortion, the wealth of his oppressor gains over the darogah to his side and relief is not obtained.'

(1) Dr. S. K. Bhuyan (Editor) - A Metrical Chronicle of Assam. p.208.

(2) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 17 January 1856, No.184. Extract on the Annual Civil Report by the Principal Assistant Commissioner, 17 January 1856.

The police officers in Assam were mostly Bengalis, and because of the low salaries native respectable Assamese were not found for these offices. To attract better local Assamese, in 1844 the Government of India declared that no darogah should receive less than 25 Rupees, and from this sum the allowances were to increase according to the following scale -

3rd Grade ...	... 50 Rupees	
2nd Grade ...	... 75	"
1st Grade ...	...100	" (1)

In 1846 Matthie wrote that 'the Police officers so far from being considered by the people a protection, were detested on account of the abuse they made of their great power'. He hoped that now as the salaries of the darogahs were raised, the native gentlemen of Assam would be attracted to these posts. He asserted that 'until persons of higher rank are appointed to such situations, little dependence can be placed in the proceedings of the Police establishments,

(1) Judicial Letters from Bengal, 28 August 1844, No.18
Vol.24.

who may be posted at a distance from the Sudder stations'.⁽¹⁾

In 1845 two darogahs were fined for irregular proceedings in Nowgong.⁽²⁾ In 1846 Captain Gordon, the Magistrate of Darrang, reported that 'I have never been able to place much reliance upon the gents at present employed by us in the Police, and I have always received their statements and proceedings with the greatest caution.....'.⁽³⁾

In 1848, Captain Butler, the Magistrate of Nowgong, reported that the darogahs produced false witnesses and sometimes concealed murder cases also for their own interests. He said that character and principle were wanting in them and unless a better class of men were appointed to those responsible situations, it was in vain to expect that they would or could be of any assistance to the magistrate in detecting and suppressing crimes and offences.⁽⁴⁾

(1) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 1 July 1846, No.136. Matthie to the Bengal Government, 30 April 1846.

(2) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 1 July 1846, No.136. Capt. Butler, the Magistrate of Nowgong to Matthie, 26 January 1846.

(3) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 1 July 1846, No.136. Gordon to Matthie, 30 January 1846.

(4) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 20 September 1848, No.201. Butler to Matthie, 2 February 1848.

In 1850, W. S. Hudson, the Joint Magistrate of Darrang, complained of 'the extreme dilatoriness and remissions' in the duties of the police darogahs and mohurrirs. He also said that in one instance the date of an izahar was post-dated in order to conceal the fact of the plaintiff having been nearly a month at the thana. ⁽¹⁾ In the same year one darogah was tried for embezzlement in Darrang and was punished. ⁽²⁾

In 1852 Captain Butler observed that he had 'nothing to say in favour of the Police'. ⁽³⁾ Mills reported in 1853 that the police in their detective capacity did not seem to be very successful. ⁽⁴⁾ In 1854 the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, in a Minute, declared that 'it is necessary[/] abundantly necessary[/] to strengthen our subordinate Police....Not only are our Thannah establishments too far for the absolute wants of the country, but excepting the Darogahs they are paid so as almost to justify corruption. When a

- (1) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 12 February 1851. No.140. Hudson to Reynolds, the Magistrate of Darrang, 7 January 1850.
- (2) Ibid, Reynolds to Matthie, 15 February 1850.
- (3) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 9 September 1852 No.108. Butler to Matthie, 21 February 1852.
- (4) Mills - Report on Assam, p.35.

Mohurrir of a Thannah is paid 7 Rupees a month, a Jemadar and Berkundazes 3/8 and 4 we may write and talk as we will, but no native can believe that we really set our faces against abuse.....'.⁽¹⁾

In 1855 the Lieutenant Governor instructed the Deputy Commissioner of Assam that as the police force were not on the whole well reported of by the local officers, it might tend to improve the body generally, 'if Bengallees were admitted as seldom as possible in competition with the educated natives of the Province, wherever persons of the latter class are available'.⁽²⁾ But as the pay of a jemadar and of a mohurrir was very low, and as a candidate for the office of a darogah had to fill both these offices previous to his appointment, very few respectable Assamese offered their services for darogaships.

Because of this state of corruption of the police, the people continued to look at them with

(1) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 29 March 1855, No.144
Minute by the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, 1 March 1854.

(2) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 29 November 1855, No.181
The Bengal Government to Matthie, 21 December 1855.

suspicion. In a contemporary Assamese novel we find a passage regarding the police which runs thus - 'The darogah named Imamuddin is a very careful man especially in pleasing the Magistrates and only for this 'virtue' on his part he was promoted from a burkandaz to a darogah. His learning also is no less creditable, for he can easily sign his name.....He catches hold of thieves by consulting the Koran. The Lock-up in his thana is a hell, so the accused person prefers to pass away one year in the jail rather than staying one night in the lock up. But the darogah is not a God without mercy, for if he is offered adequate presents, he is easily satisfied'.⁽¹⁾

Another drawback of the judicial system was said to be that the pleaders in Assam were very ignorant. Anandaram complained that 'the want of a constituted and respectable bar in the Courts of the Province has been.....productive of no small injury to the administration of justice'. He said that as there were no

(1) S. Deka Borooah (Hemchandra Borooah) - Bahire etc., p.26

regularly appointed vakeels or pleaders attached to the Courts 'the most unprincipled and ignorant men' infested them, and thus the throwing open the bar to all classes produced 'no other favorable results than an inducement to a host of illiterate and ignorant men to occupy it'. Matthie also observed that considerable time was lost in hearing a quantity of matter which a number of 'the present very inefficient vakeels' inserted in their pleading 'totally irrelevant to their cases and often extremely abusive of their opponents and it is I am sorry to have to add, notorious that many are not of good character'.⁽¹⁾ The Principal Assistant Commissioner described the pleaders of Assam as 'the hovering vulture[s] round the courts'.⁽²⁾ According to Mills, the pleaders in the courts of Assam were 'a most ignorant set', and great complaint was made 'of their incapacity and want of principle'.⁽³⁾ Mills however added that as nearly all the suits in Assam

(1) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 23 June 1847, No.151. Matthie to Jenkins, 18 March 1847.

(2) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 17 January 1856, No.184. Extract on the Annual Civil Report by the Principal Assistant Commissioner, 17 January 1856.

(3) Mills - Report on Assam, p.34.

were under hundred rupees and as the suitors were very poor, the enrolment of a regular body of pleaders would not be beneficial to the people.

Another defect of the judicial system seems to have been that witnesses were detained for long periods. In 1852 the Presidency Court of Nizamat Adalat wrote to the Deputy Commissioner that 'it is of the first importance that witnesses should be promptly and speedily discharged'.⁽¹⁾ Mills reported in 1853 that the importance of speedily discharging witnesses was not sufficiently attended to in some districts.⁽²⁾ In 1854 in Lakhimpur district ninety-one witnesses were detained for three days and upwards.⁽³⁾ In 1856 the Court of Nizamat Adalat again drew the attention of the Bengal Government to the necessity of the speedy discharge of witnesses.⁽⁴⁾

(1) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 2 September 1852, No.28. The Court of Nizamat Adalat to Matthee, 2 September 1852.

(2) Mills - Report on Assam, p.32.

(3) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 29 March 1855, No.130. The Court of Nizamat Adalat to the Bengal Government 4 August 1854.

(4) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 8 January 1857, No.32. The Court of Nizamat Adalat to the Bengal Government, 12 December 1856.

Another complaint against the judicial system was that a foreign language, namely Bengali had been introduced in the courts of Assam, which was intelligible only to the officers and other persons connected with the courts. According to Anandaram, the mass of the population and even private gentlemen possessed no knowledge of the language.

Matthie observed that 'Bengallee at present the legal medium of recording evidence is not understood by the people generally in Upper or Central Assam.....'.⁽¹⁾ One Purananda Deka Borooah wrote that 'because of the adoption of Bengali in our courts, the ryots cannot understand anything of the proceedings of the court, and if there is some mistake in writing, they have no remedy, for even if it is read aloud, they do not follow its meaning. When the case is finished, even if the writer did not commit any mistake, the defeated party puts the whole blame upon the omlahs and says, 'it is only because of the omlah that I am defeated in the case,

(1) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 4 June 1857, No.174.
Matthie to the Court of Nizamat Adalat, 3 August 1854.

otherwise I was in the right'. What a terrific harm has this state of affairs done to the ryots! ' (1)

All these defects of the judicial system compelled the Government to devise some means to improve it. But two main difficulties stood in the way, namely, the amount of petty cases and the complex law of procedure in the province. The numerous petty cases of theft hampered their quick discharge in the courts. The following table will show the number of heinous crimes and petty cases in Assam from 1845 to 1852.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Heinous crimes</u>		<u>other cases</u>	
1845	37	6,647	
1846	20	3,335	(2)
1847	42	2,544	
1848	25	3,888	
1849	28	4,104	
1850	32	4,752	
1851	43	4,359	
1852	35	4,847	

(1) The Orunudoi, March 1856, p.35

It was in 1871 that the Government introduced Assamese as the Court language in the place of Bengali.

(2) The decrease in the number of petty cases was due to the fact that those that were not proved to have occurred, were not included in the statements, while in 1845 all cases reported were recorded. (Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 9 June 1847, No.165).

In Assam, the property stolen usually consisted of brass pots and plates, some clothes and a few balls of opium. So, unless a clue to the thieves was immediately obtained, it was very difficult to recognize and recover property of this description, as almost every man possessed the same articles and almost the same pattern.⁽¹⁾

In 1847 the Magistrate of Kamrup reported that frivolous and false complaints were instituted in his district, but never carried through, and thus the time of the courts was unnecessarily wasted. He noted that 1,031 complaints were lodged, but never afterwards attended to by the complaint themselves, and that 435 cases were instituted, which the complaints failed to establish the truth of.⁽²⁾

Matthie wrote to Jenkins that 'frivolous and most troublesome litigation.....now abound [in Assam] to a distressing extent.....We ought to devise schemes to hasten the final disposal of judicial matters.....'.⁽³⁾

(1) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 9 June 1847, No.165. Henry Kellner, Sub Assistant to Gordon, the Magistrate of Darrang, 14 January 1847.

(2) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 9 June 1847, No.165. Scott to Matthie, 18 January 1847.

(3) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 23 June 1847, No.151. Matthie to Jenkins, 18 March 1847.

In 1848 he again noted that it was difficult in a province like Assam with extensive jungles, surrounded by numerous hill tribes, the wretched buildings, the great resemblance there was in all articles of costume and cooking, and other utensils used by the inhabitants, to trace and convict persons who had committed thefts, and he therefore thought that 'there is not much hope of that crime being decreased'.⁽¹⁾

These petty cases in the courts of Assam attracted the attention of Mills also. He reported in 1853 that in Kamrup the great majority of the cases were very trifling and should be disposed of with greater expedition and less formality.⁽²⁾ In Sibsagar, Mills observed, sufficient encouragement was not given to the system of 'bringing matters to a speedy issue, and the business of this [civil] Department throughout all the Courts is not disposed of in the expeditious manner which its general lightness so well admits of'.⁽³⁾

(1) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 20 September 1848, No.199.

Matthie to the Bengal Government, 18 May 1848.

(2) Mills - Report on Assam, vide - Kamroop, p.17.

(3) Ibid , Seeksagur, p.18.

In Darrang also the same dilatory system was pursued. In Nowgong, nine persons out of ten who were apprehended on charges of theft, pleaded the want of opium as impelling them to commit crime.⁽¹⁾

But the main hindrance in the path of any improvement of the judicial system was the complex law of procedure in Assam. In 1847 Matthie reported that many people refused to resort to the courts because of 'the expenses, harassment and delay they are put to in having their cases finally disposed of.' He said that 'the Mooktears and Omlahs no doubt would be pleased with more Courts as it would increase their business and profits'.⁽²⁾ Anandaram complained that 'under the former Government all complaints were heard and determined viva voce, and the party complaining obtained redress in the course of a fortnight or week.....Under the existing judicial system of the Province, a party, how trivial soever may be the nature of his complaint, can never obtain relief without submitting to a vexatious

(1) Ibid, Nowgong, p.15.

(2) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 16 April 1851, No. 22. Matthie to Jenkins, 7 September 1847.

and harassing course of procedure, extending from at least six months to an unlimited length of time; and even when he obtains an award in his favor the execution of the same is attended with so many obstacles that he is in many instances actually compelled to relinquish all hopes of recovering his dues. Justice is thereby defeated, and the people prefer giving up their just dues rather than resort to so uncertain a course and throw away money to meet the costs of suits in pursuit of an object which they are never sure of securing'. He also noted that the judicial system was 'ill suited to the simple habits of the people and the impoverished circumstances of the country'. The whole system, according to him, was 'defective, tedious, dilatory, expensive'.

Mills admitted that the system of having four written pleadings drawn up and filed in every case, was (1) 'ill suited to the simple habits of the people of Assam'.

The practice of taking written depositions had appeared to Purandar Sinha, the last King of Assam, as

(1) Mills - Report on Assam, - p.34.

an obstacle in the speedy adjustment of disputes.

"It was our custom", said the King of Assam to Scott, the first Commissioner of the province, as reported in 1832, "to hear all complaints viva voce, afterwards to summon the party complained against; and if his statement proved unsatisfactory, prompt punishment ensued, without further delay for witnesses; whilst the European gentlemen take down the complainant's deposition, and that of his witnesses, summon the defendant and take down his statement, then call for his witnesses; ere they arrive a couple of months elapse, and the Judge forgets everything, and is completely at the mercy of the omlahs, who read what they please to him; and after all the trial may be made over to the Circuit Judge." To justify the practice of writing down depositions Scott replied, 'Swarga Deo (Lord of heaven, title of Assam kings), you are of celestial origin, and can recollect everything. We are earth-born, and when we go to dinner, forget what we have heard in the course of the day; therefore we write down what we hear'.⁽¹⁾

(1) A. White - 'Memoir of David Scott, p.58-59' (In the original text the whole conversation is put in indirect tense).

So, for the speedy discharge of petty cases and to do away with the evil influence of the native omlahs Matthie suggested the more general application of the rule for the viva voce system of Assam Criminal Rules. According to this Rule 'In all petty criminal cases (viz. misdemeanor's theft to the amount of fifty rupees and offences for which magistrates in the Regulation Province are empowered to pass sentence of imprisonment not exceeding six months) evidence may be taken viva voce.'(1)

In 1852 Matthis wrote to all the Magistrates of Assam that 'sight appears to have been lost of the provision contained in the Assam Criminal Rules to which I would request the favour of your co-operation in bringing into general practice.'(2)

In the same year he wrote to the Court of Nizamat Adalat that the rule for viva voce investigation should be made absolute as it would not only generally tend to improve and expedite decisions but remove that frequent source of complaint that the omlah distorted

(1) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 16 April 1851, No. 22. Matthie to Jenkins, 7 September 1847.

(2) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 6 July 1854, No. 140. Matthie to all the Magistrates of Assam, 18 May, 1852.

the evidence in taking it down. Besides, he observed, it would make the young officers trust to themselves and their own note books for a memorandum of what had been deposed instead of to the native record and it would, he thought, give general satisfaction to all but those who were interested in obstructing or delaying justice. Matthie also suggested that in respect to cases sent up through the agency of the police the same system would be pursued in all petty cases with greater advantage. He held the opinion that the viva voce examination would not occupy a fourth of the time it then did to take the evidence. But the Deputy Commissioner also pointed out that so long as many of the thanas were at a great distance from Sadr stations with interrupted communications from swamps and jungles, it was not to be expected that police cases would be decided with the same expedition as in Bengal, but, he hoped, improvement might still be made in those as far as they depended in the magistrates' court. (1)

In 1853 the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal approved of the measures adopted by the Deputy Commissioner of Assam for the purpose of effecting 'the general substitution, in all but the more serious cases of viva voce examination by the Magistrates personally in place of the old custom of employing Mohurrers [clerks] to take down the deposition on experiment which ... has

(1) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 6 July 1854, No.140.

Matthie to the Court of Nizamat Adalat, 14 September 1852.

worked well and the result of which has been shown in the more speedy disposal of suits, and the shorter period during which witnesses have been detained.'⁽¹⁾

In 1854 the Deputy Commissioner of Assam reported that the viva voce system appeared to work 'exceedingly well' and afforded 'general satisfaction to the people,' the only persons to whom it appeared unpalatable were the mukhtars and those about the court who derived advantage from litigation. He also recommended that 'the examinations in all cases should not only be conducted by the sitting magisterial authority in person but that he should record the evidence in his vernacular, I believe such a mode of trial and record would be as expeditious as if recorded through the mohurrer always supposing the investigations are made in person by the magistrate and it is my conviction that it would be a most important step to[wards] purifying our Courts from the unlawful influences, too often used to impede justice both in and out of doors.'⁽²⁾

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- (1) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 6 July 1854, No. 148A. The Bengal Government to Matthie, 29 October 1853.
 - (2) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 4 June 1857, No. 174. The Deputy Commissioner of Assam to the Court of Nizamat Adalat, 3 March 1854.

In 1854 the Court of Nizamat Adalat expressed its full satisfaction with the admirable results which had followed the introduction of the system of trying petty criminal cases viva voce, which was, on the one hand, beneficial to the people, and on the other, satisfactory to the officer conducting the trial. The Court therefore authorized the Deputy Commissioner to carry it out as far as he possibly could.⁽¹⁾

The following table will show the average time occupied in the disposal of cases in 1851, the year prior to the enforcement of the viva voce system, contrasted with the average time for 1855:

Year.	Cases in which the agency of the police was employed.			Cases in which the agency of the police was not employed.
	Average time occupied in the mofussil	Average time occupied before the magistrate.	General average.	Average time.
1851	$4\frac{1}{3}$	$17\frac{1}{6}$	$21\frac{2}{3}$	17
1855	3	$9\frac{5}{6}$	$12\frac{5}{6}$	$4\frac{1}{3}$ (2)

- (1) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 29 March 1855, No.130. The Court of Nizamat Adalat to the Bengal Government, 4 August 1854.
- (2) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 4 June 1857, No.174. Mattheie to the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, 19 December 1856.

In 1856 the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal observed that he was 'gratified to observe the successful result of the viva voce system of examining witnesses ... There can be no doubt that this system of conducting cases must be much more acceptable to the people and tend more to elicit truth than the cumbrous and tedious method generally in force in Bengal of taking down the evidence in the first instance in writing by the omia.' (1)

In the same year, Matthie again reported that 'the system [of viva voce] is now in full operation and has entirely answered expectations. Justice being greatly expedited the influence of the native officers about the Court checked, the swarms of petty attorneys, who made a livelihood by fomenting litigation have nearly lost their occupation whilst to the people who have wrongs to complain of, the change has proved most beneficial and acceptable.' He also added that the system was found to work so well, that it had been extended to the trial of cases of a more heinous character. (2)

- (1) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 11 September 1856, No.258.
The Bengal Government to Matthie, 2 August 1856.
- (2) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 4 June 1857, No.174.
Matthie to the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal,
19 December 1856.

In 1857 the Court of Directors expressed its satisfaction over the successful results of the viva voce system.⁽¹⁾

But in spite of these attempts of the Government at purifying the judicial system of the province, some defects continued to harass the people. Many people were unwilling to resort to the thanas because of 'the trouble, expense, and inconvenience they are subjected to while conducting a Thannah prosecution.'⁽²⁾

In a poem written in 1860 by an Assamese we find the following lines, 'if somebody files a case, it is conducted in a very good way. But the witnesses are so greedy for money that they turn the truth into a lie, so it is difficult to expect justice.'⁽³⁾

Thus though the machinery of justice was improved by the viva voce system, many evils continued as before. It should be remembered that in a country

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- (1) Bengal Judicial Despatches, 16 December 1857, No. 64, Vol. 5.
 - (2) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 11 September 1856, No. 246. The Sub Assistant Commissioner Nowgong to Matthie, 25 January 1856.
 - (3) The Orunudo, August 1860, p.117.

like Assam governed by an authoritarian, aristocratic system for centuries, the rule of law as introduced by the British was still a novelty. Besides in oriental countries the practice of making 'presents' to Government officers was common, so the judicial officers and the police found it hard to accept English ideas of the duties of a public servant. In short, the judicial system was far from perfect.

Note

In the Assamese novel mentioned above we find a description of the administration of justice in Assam. Though we cannot say anything regarding the authenticity of the facts alluded to, still it suggests the attitude of some people to the courts:

'One Birendra Borooah had a personal grievance against a priest and to take revenge upon him placed five jack fruits, from his own garden near the priest's place of worship at night, and the next day filed a case in the court against him. Mr. Eatwell was a Joint Magistrate and also was in charge of dewanny collectorship.

He had just arrived from England, not to speak of having any knowledge of the laws, he hardly followed the Assamese language. He used to come to the court and sat there like an earthen image. Mr. Eatwell, because of his ignorance, had to depend upon a native seristadar for everything that went on in the court. The priest's party gave him a golden ring as a bribe and promised him more if they won the case

It was already 2.00 p.m. when Mr. Eatwell arrived in the court whistling in delight and accompanied by a little dog. The moment he was seen at a distance, everybody in the court saluted him in great form.

Eatwell: 'Well, Seristadar, what case is there today?'

Seristadar: 'There is a case of 'Dos Ain' [Regulation ten], Sir.

E: 'Well, is Dos Ain present here?'

S: 'Sir, Dos Ain is not a man, but it is a case relating to it.'

E: (looking at his head clerk), what the deuce does this fellow mean by Dos Ain case? I can't make either head or tail of it.'

Head Clerk: 'A rent case, Sir.'

E: 'A rent case! I don't understand a bit of it. Bring it to my bunglaw; is there anything more?'

S: 'There is a criminal case of the theft of kathal [jack fruit] sir.'

E: 'What is a kathal?'

S: 'It is a fruit, Sir,'

E: 'Where were the kathals found?'

S: 'Near his namghar [place of worship], Sir.'

E: 'Well then, call namghar to the court and everything will be out.'

S: 'Sir, this namghar is not a man, but is a house.'

E: 'Well, I now understand, the priest is the thief, I will give him rigorous imprisonment for three years.'

At last, at the seristadar's persuasion, Eatwell ordered the priest to pay a fine of ten rupees.⁽¹⁾

(1) S.Deka Borooah (Hemchandra Borooah): Bahire Rong Song etc., p.37.

Chapter V.

Education in Assam, 1845 - 1858.

Before the coming of the British, education in Assam was mainly confined to the Brahmins. The British Government established some vernacular schools. In 1836 the Government decided to impart education to the people through the upper classes through English language. Accordingly, two English schools were started in Gauhati and Sibsagar. But as there was not much progress in the two English schools, in 1844 these were converted into vernacular ones, and English was made optional. In the same year, the Government appointed Robinson, the head master of the Gauhati English school as the Inspector of Schools in Assam. He was instructed to visit every school frequently, to introduce an uniform system of instruction in all schools, to exercise a vigilant control over the teachers, to see that each

school was supplied with the books necessary for their instruction, 'either gratis or at a moderate price,' to persuade the people to send their children to the schools and 'to carry out the views of Government in diffusing throughout the province the means of a sound and gradually improving system of education through the medium of the native language.'⁽¹⁾ The Government also instructed all the district officers 'to afford every encouragement to the Natives to avail themselves of the means provided by Government for the education of their children.'⁽²⁾

But in its attempt to impart education amongst the people, the Government faced one main difficulty. Many Brahmin teachers in Assam refused to admit Muslims and low caste Hindus to the Government Vernacular Schools, and defied the instructions of the Inspector and of the Collectors when they insisted on their doing so. At last in Sibsagar thirteen Muslim boys were admitted, but were not allowed to sit with Hindu boys in the same classroom. The teachers again refused to comply with the orders of the Inspector when

(1) Bengal Education Reports, 1843-44, Appendix 5, p.cxiii. The Bengal Government to Jenkins, 29 April 1844.

(2) Ibid.

he asked them to admit the Muslims to the classrooms. Again, in some schools, the teachers, in spite of the rulings of the Inspector to the contrary, insisted on maintaining the images of Hindu Gods and Goddesses in the class rooms.⁽¹⁾

The Government now emphatically declared that its object was not to confine the benefits of education to any particular class, or to promote distinct courses of studies suitable to the condition and sphere of life to which each might belong, but to promote generally the moral and intellectual advancement of the people.⁽²⁾

In 1845 there were fifty-eight vernacular schools in Assam maintained by the Government.⁽³⁾ While in all these schools the medium of instruction was Bengali, there were two Anglo-Vernacular schools in Gauhati and Sibsagar where sixty-three students were learning English (thirty-three in Gauhati and thirty in Sibsagar).⁽⁴⁾

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- (1) Bengal Education Reports, 1844-46, Appendix 4, p.cxcix. Robinson's Report.
 - (2) Bengal Education Consultations, 14 May 1845, No.21. The Bengal Government to Jenkins, 5 March 1845.
 - (3) Bengal Education Consultations, 17 September 1845, No.32. Robinson to Jenkins, 6 June 1845.
 - (4) Bengal Education Reports, 1844-46, Appendix No.6. p.ccxxxiv.

But as progress in education was found to be slow, in 1852 Robinson suggested that indigenous or self-supporting schools should be established throughout Assam. He held that if the people themselves could be enlisted for the improvement of education, half the number of Government schools could be closed, while the funds then allowed for their maintenance might be appropriated in rendering the other half more efficient.⁽¹⁾ Nothing, however, was done on the proposal at the time.

In 1854 after the despatch of the Court of Directors, to place the superintendence and direction of education upon a more systematic footing, an Education Department was created in the several Presidencies of India. An adequate system of inspection and grants-in-aid was to become an essential part of the educational system.⁽²⁾

In Assam, the whole duty of inspection fell on Robinson, but he could not visit all the schools regularly. So in May 1855 three second grade sub-Inspectors were appointed to the province. They visited the Government

(1) Bengal Education Reports, 1851-52, p.168-71.

(2) Parliamentary papers, Vol. 47, Paper 393, p.2.
The Court of Directors to the Governor-General,
19 July 1854.

village schools at least three times in the year and some of the m as often as five and six times. Robinson reported that their frequent visits had acted as a wholesome check on the teachers, and said that '... the result has been satisfactory; that is, comparatively speaking, for the Schools are far from being in an efficient state, and even in the best of them there is much room for improvement.' (1)

Again, in 1855 the Bengal Government instructed all the mofussil officers 'to give a preference ot persons who can read and write over those who cannot, for all offices, however small the salary, unless where obvious reasons exist for overlooking such qualifications.' (2) The results of this measure of the Government were very encouraging. Robinson reported that 'it has led many grown up men to seek for instruction, who under other circumstances, would never have learnt a single letter of the alphabet.' (3)

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- (1) Bengal Education Reports, 1856-57, Appendix A, p.149. Robinson to the Director of Public Instruction, 14 June 1856.
 - (2) Bengal Education Reports, 1855-56, Appendix B, p.3. The Bengal Government Notification, 9 July 1855.
 - (3) Bengal Education Reports, 1856-57, Appendix A, p.47. Robinson's Report for the quarter ending October 1856.

There was already a normal school in Gauhati whose purpose was to supply trained teachers with provision for a maximum of thirty-six pupils. In 1856 Robinson reported that employment as village school teachers on the maximum pay of seven rupees a month could not attract bright pupils to the normal school. In the same year only twenty-four pupils attended the school and 'these', said the Inspector, 'are not exactly of the material from which really efficient teachers can be made.'⁽¹⁾ To improve the efficiency of the teachers, he suggested a graduated scale of salaries for them from fifteen rupees to six rupees a month. But the Government of India refused to sanction the proposal and declared that 'the former scale of salary seems much the most consistent with what ought to be the scale of village school master's pay.'⁽²⁾

In 1855 Robinson wrote that more schools were wanted in order that the benefits of education might be more generally diffused, and as 'it would be

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- (1) Bengal Public Consultations, 17 September 1857, No.108. Robinson to the Director of Public Instruction, 17 June 1856.
 - (2) Bengal Education Reports, 1856-57, p.34. The Director of Public Instruction to the Bengal Government, 25 August 1857.

unreasonable to expect that the Government can provide adequate means of or supplying the gigantic deficiency', he again suggested that indigenous or self-supporting schools should be encouraged.⁽¹⁾ To induce the people to take an interest in education, in 1856 the Bengal Government declared that it was prepared to give grants to indigenous or self-supporting schools, on condition that 'no Grant will in any case exceed in amount the sum expended on the Institution from private sources, and the Government will always endeavour so to give its aid that the effect shall not be the substitution of public for private expenditure, but the increase and improvement of Education.'⁽²⁾

In 1856 there were thirty-six indigenous schools in Assam (ten in Kamrup, two in Darrang, twenty-three in Sibsagar, one in Lakhimpur) and the total number of pupils attending these was 1479.⁽³⁾ Robinson stated

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- (1) Bengal Public Consultations, 3 September 1857, No.159. Robinson to the Director of Public Instruction, 24 November 1855.
 - (2) Bengal Education Reports, 1855-56, Appendix B, p.1. Bengal Government's Orders, 19 July 1856.
 - (3) Bengal Public Consultations, 17 September 1857, No.108. Robinson to the Director of Public Instruction, 14 June 1856.

that as the people were very poor and as the teachers could not raise the fees, the schools had not sufficient funds to apply for grants-in-aid.⁽¹⁾

To remedy this state of affairs, in 1857 the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal asked the Government of India for a discretionary power 'to adapt the amount of the grant to the peculiar wants and circumstances of each school, provided however that the amount of the grant shall in no case exceed three fourths of the entire cost of the School.'⁽²⁾ But the Government of India rejected this proposal on the ground that the lower classes were still indifferent to education and the upper classes were 'not actively desirous that their inferiors should be educated.' The Government declared that all they could do in such a situation was to 'set before the people in every way the advantage of teaching their children to read and write' According to the Government 'to go beyond this limit would in the opinion of the Governor-General in Council be consistent neither with the principle

(1) Bengal Education Reports, 1856-57, Appendix A, p.156. Robinson to the Director of Public Instruction, 14 June 1856.

(2) Bengal Public Consultations, 17 September 1857 No.111. The Bengal Government to the Government of India, 20 March 1857.

of encouraging private effort and combination nor with a due regard to the public finances. (1)

If the Government refused to revise the grant-in-aid rules, it however encouraged the subsidized schools. Under the subsidy system in 1857, a grant was given at the rate of one rupee a month for every ten boys under instruction. (2)

Thus from 1845 to 1858 there was considerable progress in the field of education. The following table illustrates this:

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- (1) Bengal Public Consultations, 17 September 1857, No.115. The Government of India to the Bengal Government, 31 July 1857.
- (2) Bengal Education Report, 1857-58, p.172-173.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Types of Schools.</u>		<u>Total.</u>
	<u>Government vernacular</u>	<u>Anglo-vernacular</u>	
1845-46	58	2	60 (1)
1846-47	62	3	65 (2)
1847-48	65	3	68 (3)
1848-49	72	Not available	72 (4)
1849-51	Not available	" "	
1851-52	74	" "	74 (5)
1852-55	Not available	" "	
1855-56	77	" "	77 (6)
1856-57	Not available	" "	
1857-58	74	" "	74 (7)

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- (1) Bengal Education Consultations, 17 September 1845, No. 32.
- (2) Bengal Education Reports, 1846-47, p.178.
- (3) Bengal Education Reports, 1846-47, p.159.
- (4) Bengal Education Reports, 1848-49, p.314.
- (5) Bengal Education Reports, 1851-52, p.168-171.
- (6) Bengal Education Reports, 1855-56, Appendix A, p.85-89.
- (7) Bengal Education Reports, 1857-58, p.161.

In 1857-58 there were 2801 pupils in the Government village schools, but the average attendance was 1800. In the indigenous (sixteen in Sibsagar and nineteen in Kamrup) and in the subsidized schools there were 1522 and 1852 pupils respectively.⁽¹⁾

Robinson observed that though there could not be any comparison of Assam with the more advanced parts of India, yet 'it is gratifying to be able to report some degree of success, however small, in our endeavours to persuade the people to take their share in promoting the diffusion of knowledge; and we must trust for the rest to time',⁽²⁾

Side by side with the growth of the Government and the aided schools, the Christian missionaries also contributed much to the establishment of educational institutions in the province. They were the pioneers in establishing girls' schools in the land against great odds. Robinson observed that 'the native prejudice against female instruction is strong ... native parents of

(1) Bengal Education Report, 1857-58, pp.171-173.

(2) Bengal Education Reports, 1856-57, Appendix A, p. 151. Robinson to the Director of Public Instruction, 14 June 1856.

respectable rank are unwilling to allow their daughters contrary to the customs of native society to leave their own homes and proceed to the house of a stranger for the purpose of receiving instruction .⁽¹⁾ But the missionaries worked their way through these difficulties, and in 1854 there were nine missionary vernacular schools with 280 boys, and one girls' boarding school with 9 girls in Sibsagar. In Nowgong by 1854 they established three vernacular schools with 100 boys, one boys' boarding school with 50 boys, and one girls' boarding school with 15 girls. At Gauhati there were two vernacular boys' schools with 80 boys, three boys' boarding schools, and one girls' boarding school with 13 girls.⁽²⁾ In 1854 the Governor-General granted fifty rupees per month to Hesselmeyer of the Tezpur mission, Darrang 'for the secular instruction' of the Cachari population of the district.⁽³⁾ In 1855 he established three schools in Darrang and asked from the Government a further sum of fifteen rupees per month for the purchase of books. Accordingly, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal granted this amount.⁽⁴⁾

(1) Bengal Education Consultations, 17 September 1845, No.32. Robinson to Jenkins, 6 June 1845.

(2) M. Wylie: Bengal as a Field of Missions, p.89.

(3) Bengal Public Consultations, 14 September 1854, No.83. The Government of India to the Bengal Government, 21 August, 1854.

(4) Bengal Public Constutations, 12 July 1855, No.107. The Bengal Government to Jenkins, 7 July 1855.

In 1856 one hundred and fifty three boys attended the schools started by Hesselmeier.⁽¹⁾

The missionaries also published a monthly newspaper 'Orunudoï' in Assamese in January 1846, which was the first of its kind in Assam. Besides articles of a religious and scientific character, it gave the important news of the day from all parts of the world. Many Assamese took a great interest in the paper and contributed interesting articles to it.

But a great difficulty faced the missionaries in their attempt to educate the people. This was the prevalence of Bengali as the medium of instruction in the schools. In 1854 Bronson, an American missionary observed that they had established two printing presses, and published a number of elementary books, and a monthly paper in Assamese, but because of the substitution of Bengali for Assamese, they found themselves 'far less favourably situated' than they had hoped for effecting good to the people. He declared that 'always and every-

(1) Bengal Public Consultations, 7 May 1857, No.103. Hesselmeier to the Director of Public Instruction, 18 December 1856.

where the language used is Assamese, not Bengalee; in our humble opinion, the only way to render any plan of Education popular in this Province, is to give it to them in their own mother tongue ... We believe that the Government Schools will continue to languish and be unpopular, until after years of fruitless experiment the Government will come to see that it is best to hold out the helping hand through the medium of their own vernacular.'(1)

Agreeing with the views of the missionaries, Mills noted that the prevalence of Bengali as the medium of instruction was a main cause of the unpopularity of the schools. He said that 'an English youth is not taught Latin until he is well grounded in English, and in the same manner, an Assamese should not be taught a foreign language until he knows his own.'(2)

But Robinson held that the language spoken in Assam was essentially the same as Bengali. The differences

(1) Bengal Public Consultations, 1 March 1855, No.93. Bronson to the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, 13 November 1854.

Another missionary, Danforth described education in Assam as 'emphatically a foreign plant' and concluded that unless Assamese was taught in the schools in place of Bengali, there would be 'the greatest impediment to the elevation and improvement of the Assamese.'

(Bengal Public Consultations, 1 March 1855, No.94. Danforth to Bronson, 30 October 1854.)

(2) Mills: Report on Assam, p.26.

between the two languages, he said, were essentially in the grammar, and not in the vocabulary. Besides, it was better to utilize the books written in Bengali 'in preference to creating a distinct literature for a comparatively small section of the people merely for the sake of perpetuating what at best is but a dialectical difference.' (1)

Side by side with the opening of the schools, some progress was evident in other directions also. Public libraries were coming into vogue in the province. In 1854 Captain Rowlatt, the Principal Assistant of Kamrup raised a subscription of Rupees 444-8-0 for the purpose of a library, and he requested Jenkins to allow him to use a Government building for the purpose. (2) Accordingly

- (1) Bengal Public Consultations, 1 March 1855, No. 94.
Some remarks in defence of the use of Bengali in the Government Schools in Assam - by Robinson.

But Anandaram and the Missionaries continued to agitate for the use of Assamese to take the place of Bengali. In 1855 Anandaram published his 'A few remarks on the Assamese language and on vernacular education' in which he showed that Assamese was a distinct language. In 1868 Bronson published one Anglo-Assamese dictionary. At last in 1871 the Government introduced Assamese as the medium of instruction in the schools.

- (2) Bengal Public Consultations, 13 July 1854, No. 50.
 Jenkins to the Bengal Government, 16 June 1854.

the Bengal Government approved of the establishment of a reading-room and public library at Gauhati and authorized Jenkins to use one of the rooms of the school house for that purpose.⁽¹⁾ In 1854 the Lieutenant Governor declared that he was willing to give a small donation towards the construction of a building for the library at Goalpara.⁽²⁾

All these factors, the establishment of schools, the starting of a newspaper, the opening of libraries and the contact with foreigners began to influence the minds of educated people. Goonabhiram ⁽³⁾ wrote, 'We are gradually attaining more learning, culture and civilization, and those superstitions which prevented the people from doing good things are gradually vanishing.'

- (1) Bengal Public Constultations, 13 July 1854, No.52. The Bengal Government to Jenkins, 13 July 1854.
- (2) Bengal Public Consultations, 4 January 1855, No.19. The Bengal Government to Jenkins, 30 December 1854.
- (3) Goonabhiram Borooah was born in Jorhat, Assam in 1837. In 1854 he took his education in the Presidency College, Calcutta. In 1859 he was appointed the Sub Assistant Commissioner and was posted in Tezpur. In 1869 he was converted to the Brahmo Samaj. He died on 25 March 1894.

We are very happy that our c^untry shows signs of improvement Formerly, there was no society in our land to preach enlightenment, but now in Sibsagar and in some places a few societies have been started. (1)

Gradually, some educated minds began to question the old basis of society. One writer 'N.L.' wrote, 'If you go and tell our people to acquire learning, they say, 'Oh, we have got all the knowledge!' But the English are not like us. There was an Englishman who was so inquisitive about everything that he even wondered why the fruits from the trees should fall down, and not go up, and at last he discovered the secrets of the movements of the solar system (2) Anandaram asked the people to read the history of England, if they wanted to prosper like the English. (3) Another enthusiast observed that if the Assamese could form associations as in Britain, to discuss things of common interest, the future of the province would be very bright. (4)

Some writers began to advocate women's education. One argued that the very fact that the women of Great Britain

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- (1) Hemchandra Goswami (Editor): Typical Selections from Assamese Literature, Vol. III, Part 1, p.204-5.
- (2) The Orunudo, February 1847, p.15.
- (3) The Orunudo, April 1847, p.28.
- (4) The Orundo, September 1846, p.66.

were 'so educated', proved that they had the same intelligence as men.⁽¹⁾ Another writer wrote, 'how sad is the state of our women! When the English treat their wives with kindness and love, our men laugh at them! It is very unfair, for the women are naturally weak, if the menfolk do not show consideration for them, who will do it? Our men think that their women are no better than their cattle, moreover, they do not allow them to be educated even! It is very unjust!'⁽²⁾

Hemchandra Borooah asked the Assamese people to desist from polygamy. He praised the English as they were 'free from these great sins only through the power of knowledge.'⁽³⁾ He also advocated the cause of re-marriage of widows. He observed that 'if a man can marry again when his wife dies, why should the woman be deprived of this right? I earnestly hope that our educated younger generation will help the cause of re-marriage of widows, and will no more be slaves of superstition and our old customs '⁽⁴⁾ Another writer said that as

(1) The Orunudoï, October 1853, p.150.

(2) The Orunudoï, October 1856, p.154.

(3) The Orunudoï, April 1856, p.51-52.

(4) H. Goswami (Editor): Typical Selections from Assamese Literature, Vol. III. Part I, p.177.

the Assamese people were slaves to custom, it was a great hindrance to the progress of the country. He asked people to be dynamic like the English.⁽¹⁾

The poor condition of Assamese language also attracted the attention of some minds. 'One Assamese' asked the people to enrich their language by reading English.⁽²⁾

Some sections of the Assamese people soon began to realize that to catch up with the West, Assam must progress in the art of manufacture. One writer gave an inspiring call to the people thus: 'Oh my Assamese friends, 1800 years ago the English were savages. But the same people today have become rich, powerful and civilized. An English machine can perform jobs, what a thousand men or a thousand horses cannot do. They possess ships which are as big as royal palaces and they can travel all over the world. Oh, my Assamese friends, if you want to be like the English, if you want to earn, respect, or to improve in science and commerce, then read English books and acquire their arts.'⁽³⁾ Another writer noted that, 'the English

(1) The Orunudoï, September 1857, p.142.

(2) The Orunudoï, May 1853, p.67.

(3) The Orunudoï, September 1846, p.68.

earn 100,000,000 lakhs of rupees every year by manufacturing iron. In Assam also, there are iron ores in our mountains, but we are so lazy that we never try to enrich our country.' (1)

'An Assamese' wrote that 'as the English are educated, they are fortunate in all respects. They have improved commerce, while we have not even the one thousandth part of the machines they have got' (2)

While some sections of the people welcomed the establishment of schools and began to question the old basis of society, the upper classes and the higher castes however were actively hostile to the diffusion of learning amongst the masses. They were particularly opposed to the teaching of English in the schools, as they feared that by learning English students would become Christians. Hemchandra Borooah, a leading Assamese of the time faced active opposition from his family when he wanted to learn English. Anandaram had to declare in his death-bed that though he admired the English and their achievements, yet he was not a Christian, as many people accused him to be. (3)

(1) The Orunudo, October 1846, p.78.

(2) The Orunudo, October 1853, p.150.

(3) G. Borooah: Anandaram Dhekial Phukanar Jivan Charitra [Life of Anandaram Phukan], p.277.

Jenkins reported that the numerous priests and the nobles of Sibsagar were adverse to the spread of education amongst the lower class Hindus and Mahomedans in a greater degree than in other parts of Assam.⁽¹⁾

Mills reported that the respectable classes seemed 'to take little or not interest in the institutions.'⁽²⁾

John Butler held that 'if the higher classes could prevent the Assamese youth being educated, they would not hesitate to do so. The supineness and indifference of the most influential men ... can scarce be conceived, except by those in personal and constant intercourse with them. They seldom visit the schools, and when required to build or repair a school-house, they deem it a kind of oppression: it is, indeed, lamentable to witness the lukewarmness of the native gentry of Assam in regard to education.'⁽³⁾

'An Assamese' wrote that 'it is a matter of deep regret that the bishoyas [the officials], the priests and the upper classes have neither educated themselves, nor do they encourage their children, or their followers to attain

(1) Bengal Education Consultations, 17 September 1845, No. 31. Jenking to the Bengal Government, 24 June 1845

(2) Mills: Report on Assam, p.27.

(3) J. Butler: Travels and Adventures in Assam, p.240.

learning ... '(1)

In a contemporary Assamese novel we find a priest saying thus: 'the moment the schools were established in our country, we knew that we would lose our caste. The boys who go to the schools say that the real sins in life are lying, bribery and committing immoral acts, and virtue does not lie in observing old customs. Oh, you cannot defeat these boys through argument, they should be flogged mercilessly.' (2)

In fact, the questioning of the old order alarmed conservative circles. One such writer Lombodar Bora wrote a few years later, 'because of the influence of civilization and of science (which is another name for ignorance) all are forsaking religion If you publish a newspaper ... and write of religion, not only will everybody give up your paper, but they will call you mad. What about God? He is in a bad state indeed! Even those people who have just heard the name of Mill become agnostics, and begin to think 'Oh, I am also a Mill!' (3) The same writer poured scorn upon the reformist who 'speaks against

(1) The Orunudoï, January 1854, p.14.

(2) S.D. Borooah (Hemchandra Borooah) - Bahire etc. p.17-18.

(3) H. Goswami (Editor): Typical Selections from Assamese Literature, Vol.III, Part II, p.385.

the veiling of women, who looks at women directly, who rejects untouchability and who drinks wine'.

Bora also abused the new generation of 'cultured' men who 'mix with the people of different castes, give freedom to their wives and are against religion'.⁽¹⁾

Again, criticizing the new spirit of change, Bora satirically said, 'I am writing a new dictionary where all words will bear a new meaning. Because of the coming of the new civilization, words have entirely changed their meaning....[in writing] whose inspiration shall I seek? Will it be the spirit of Byron? Oh no, he only indulges in love themes! But we want foreign and not native inspiration! ..Well, leave everything national, and accept everything foreign! ' (2)

Thus we notice that the development of new ideas spread gloom among the upholders of the old order. In the next two chapters we will see how the class which suffered most under British regime, that is, the aristocracy,

(1) Ibid, p.390 - 91

(2) Ibid, p.387.

recoiled from these changes and pined for their
lost golden age and the result was the Mutiny of 1857.

T A B L E

Sums granted by the Government for
education in Assam from 1845 to 1857

<u>Year</u>				<u>Grants</u>	
1845-46	...	...	...	Rs. 10,432 - 10 - 8	(1)
1846-47	...	...	...	not available	
1847-48	...	...	...	Rs. 9,816 - 0 - 0	(2)
1848-49	...	...	...	Rs. 9,866 - 0 - 0	(3)
1849-50	...	...	...	not available	
1850-51	...	...	...	Rs. 9,866 - 0 - 0	(4)
1851-52	...	...	...	Rs. 9,866 - 0 - 0	(5)
1852-53	...	...	...	not available	
1853-54	Rs. 9,866 - 0 - 0	(6)
1854-55	Rs. 9,866 - 0 - 0	(7)
1855-56	not available	
1856-57	Rs. 17,106 - 1 - 0	(8)

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- (1) Bengal Education Reports, 1844-46, Appendix 6, p.clvi
 (2) Bengal Education Reports, 1848-49, Appendix N, NoII,
 p.ccclxxxvii
 (3) Bengal Education Reports, 1848-49, Appendix N, No.IV,
 p.cccxcv
 (4) Bengal Education Reports, 1850-51, Appendix E, p.cxciv
 (5) Bengal Education Reports, 1851-52, Appendix E, p.ccxlix
 (6) Bengal Education Reports, 1852-55, Appendix G, p.cccxcv
 (7) Bengal Education Reports, 1855, p.cix
 (8) Bengal Education Reports, 1856-57, Appendix D, p.77.

Chapter VI

The fate of the aristocracy under British rule

During the Ahom rule the aristocracy were composed of the various officers of state, the foremost of whom were called the three Gohains. Of these three the Barpatra Gohain was the highest in rank, and was allowed 6,000 men (paiks). The Bar Gohain was the second in rank, and was allowed 4,000 men. The Bura Gohain had also the same allowance.⁽¹⁾ The king could not issue any commands or declare war against the wishes of the three Gohains. Besides being the hereditary counsellors of state, they enjoyed various other privileges also. They used special kinds of palanquins, umbrellas with golden caps and so on. Their wives also had these marks of honour conferred upon them.⁽²⁾ The king's coronation was regarded as legal only when the three Gohains assented to it. Some kings were like playthings in the hands of the Gohains.

(1) Hamilton - An Account of Assam, p.18.

(2) Dr. S. K. Bhuyan - Ahomar Din /the days of the Ahoms/, p.24.

The Bar Barua or great secretary was the fourth great officer of state. He was the head of the executive and had 14,000 paiks under his control, but these paiks were also employed for royal purposes. For his domestic purposes he could employ seven per cent of these paiks. He also administered justice, and had fees on all commissions and on all cases that came before his court.

The inferior officers of state at the capital were the six Phukans. The Phukans helped the Bar Barua in the administration of justice. The Naobaicha Phukan was in charge of royal boats, the Bhitaraual Phukan in charge of a royal clan or khel, the Dihingiya Phukan in charge of the Dihing territory and the Neog Phukan was a commander of the army. They enjoyed special insignias of honour, such as umbrellas with silver caps, special kinds of fans, silver sticks and so on. A Phukan commanded 6,000 men.

The Barua was the officer next in dignity to the Phukan. He was generally a departmental or administrative head or a deputy. He was entitled to the charge of two to three thousand men.

There were twelve Rajkhowas under the orders

of the Bar Barua. A Rajkhowa was ordinarily the governor of a territory and head of the levies raised from his jurisdiction. He had generally 3,000 men under his control.

There was much similarity between the Ahom khel system and the Mogul Mansabdari system. The Ahoms probably took the cue from the Moguls in the matter.⁽¹⁾ According to the mansabdari system, the number of soldiers under an officer was related to his rank. There was some similarity also in the gradation of the insignias between the two systems.

In many ways, the upper classes raised up insuperable barriers to secure their distinction and separation from the lower classes. For instance, no person of low birth could wear the chadar (sheet usually thrown over the body as a covering), unless it was folded on the left shoulder and not on the right. Again, Muslims, fishermen, sweepers and braziers were not permitted to wear long hair. Even in making designs of houses strict rules were drawn between the high and the low. Only the privileged ones could use japis (umbrellas), and

(1) Dr. S.K. Bhuyan: Anglo-Assamese Relations, 1771 to 1826, p.11.

the lower classes were not allowed to wear flower garlands. Again, only a few members of the upper classes could ride on horses, and when the common people met the higher ones in public streets, they had to go aside. If any member of the lower classes put on clothes hanging beneath his knees, his nose and ears were cut off.⁽¹⁾ The class of fishermen were so much looked down upon that their foreheads were marked with marks of fish, so that they might not be able to mix with the members of the higher classes.⁽²⁾

Besides, the very livelihood of the privileged classes depended upon the existence of slavery.⁽³⁾ Any person of rank could take up and clear jungle lands with his slaves, and these estates called khats were hereditary and paid no rent to the Government.⁽⁴⁾ Major Butler, the Collector of Nowgong, related in 1847 that 'by the ancient Assam laws, slavery existed in a variety of forms The king had the power to grant to his nobles and spiritual advisers portions of the free population as

- (1) Dr. S.K. Bhuyan: Ahomar Din /The days of the Ahoms/ pp.70-71.
- (2) Goonabhiram Borooah: Assam Buranji (History of Assam) p. 249.
- (3) About the economic privileges of the aristocracy we have dealt with in Chapter II.
- (4) Board's Collections, Vol. 2541, No. 148,248, p.134. Jenkins to the Board of Revenue, 13 November 1849.

slaves, which the owner could dispose of in any manner he thought proper ... in each district the value of slaves varied considerably the price of the lower castes, denominated Joges, Doomes, Cachares, Boreahs and Burahees, was one-third less [than those of the good castes/].⁽¹⁾

These slaves had to mortgage themselves for the want of a few rupees, and they were bought and sold like any other article of property and the system was hereditary.⁽²⁾

The British Government released the slaves in 1843. As no compensation was made to the slave-holders the condition of the nobility deteriorated. An eye-witness observed that 'a deep seated crisis is overtaking the Assamese society. Those classes who enjoyed all the privileges from the slaves are facing disaster because of their emancipation. The upper classes can neither engage themselves in manual labour, nor can take the help of others because of lack of means. Even if they engage serfs or servants, these lower orders do not have the same subservient attitude to them as before ... The ordinary people refuse to be slaves any more as they still

(1) John Butler: A Sketch of Assam, p.145-46.

(2) W. Robinson: A Descriptive Account of Assam, p.279.

remember the wretched condition of the slaves in former days Indeed, a social crisis is overwhelming us'.⁽¹⁾

The British Government in order to afford relief to the aristocracy appointed them native judges. They were also provided 'as far as possible' with the charge of mouzas (revenue districts), 'but', Jenkins observed, 'as none of them trade, and none have landed property, there are 20 applicants for every situation.'⁽²⁾ The Government also granted them pensions according to their previous status which in 1853 exceeded Rupees 12,000 a month.⁽³⁾ But these measures of the Government were mere palliatives in the face of an acute problem and the aristocracy's condition became worse every day. A few instances are cited below.

In 1849 Jenkins reported that Anandi Gohain 'an Ahom of the first rank' was reduced to great wretchedness because of the loss of his slaves, and his six grown up sons were entirely unprovided for. He therefore urged upon the Government that a total remission of revenue should

- (1) G. Borooah: Assam Buranji (History of Assam), p.283.
- (2) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 26 July 1855, No.27. Jenkins to the Bengal Government, 16 July 1855.
- (3) Gait: A History of Assam, p.308.

be granted to him and that after his death his sons should be allowed to pay half revenue.⁽¹⁾ The Government of India, while sanctioning the remission of the 'Government revenue upon the land held by him amounting to Rupees 42-6-11, declared that it would only be 'a life remission in favour of the father and will on no consideration be extended to any of his sons, but will cease on the father's death.'⁽²⁾ Similarly, in 1850 the Governmet of India sanctioned the remission of a balance of revenue amounting to Rupees 749-3-10 $\frac{3}{4}$ to Govinda Malla, Santi Malla and others of Kamrup district. The Governor-General informed the Court of Directors that the family was 'one /of of high respectability, and till lately had been one[^] the most influential and wealthy of the place; and the inability of the parties to meet the Government demand had been mainly attributable to the passing of Act V of 1843, which had deprived them of the services of their numerous slaves in which their wealth chiefly consisted.'⁽³⁾

Sometimes the Government had to grant advances for marriages and other purposes to ex-nobles. In 1852

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- (1) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 4 July 1849, No.13. Jenkins to the Board of Revenue, 15 May 1849.
 - (2) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 3 October 1849, No.9. The Government of India to the Bengal Government, 22 September 1849.
 - (3) Revenue Letter from Bengal, 15 February, 1850, No.3. Revenue Letters from Bengal, Vol. 45.

the Governor of Bengal made an advance of Rupees 500 to the younger son of the late Raja Chandra Kanta to defray the expenses of his daughter's marriage 'repayable by deductions of Rupees 50 monthly from his Pension.'⁽¹⁾

In the same year the Governor had to advance Rupees 100 to the mother of the late Raja Purandar Sinha, the last king of Assam, 'to enable her to repair her houses before the rains' to be repaid by monthly instalments of twenty rupees per month from her pension.⁽²⁾

The Governor also granted Rupees 260 to Raja Khageswar Sinha 'to pay some of his creditors who were very importunate in their demands against him' to be repaid by monthly instalments of twenty five rupees from his pension.⁽³⁾

The sufferings of the aristocracy secured the attention even of the home authorities. The Court of Directors informed the Governor-General that he should not overlook 'the importance as a matter of policy as well as

- (1) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 19 February 1852, No.37.
The Bengal Government to Jenkins, 18 February 1852.
- (2) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 25 March 1852, No.24.
The Bengal Government to Jenkins, 25 March 1852.
- (3) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 3 June 1852, No.21.
The Bengal Government to Jenkins, 3 June 1852.

humanity, of not allowing persons who had held important positions and been respected by the people, and whose interests had been affected by our sway, to fall into indigence and become objects of general compassion. '(1)

Mills admitted in 1853 that the emancipation of slaves had 'reduced the only men of substance in Assam to absolute poverty.' He said that 'I cannot find that the circumstances of the slave holders were made known to the Government when Act V of 1843 was passed, or that its effects upon the Assamese were considered. A census of the slaves should have been ascertained, and some compensation, in the shape of a remission of rent for a stated period, should have been made to the owners of the slaves. '(2)

He also noted that he had received numerous petitions from the old nobles praying for pensions and the restoration of their slaves, but he held that 'Government cannot be expected to give pensions in perpetuity. '(3)

Being deprived of their former privileges the aristocracy fell in social esteem also. Captain Reynolds, the Magistrate of Darrang reported that during the old Ahom

(1) Political Letters to India, 4 June 1851, No.18, Vol. 16.

(2) Mills: Report on Assam, p.17.

(3) Ibid, vide: Kamrup, p.12.

rule, the people had to render services for the works of public utility, but now the lower castes refused to render any service to the higher castes in the repairing of roads, and the low caste man said, 'why should I work for the Brahmins. Let him clear his share and I will do mine or else let him give a substitute. But the Brahmin will neither do one or the other '(1)

Major Butler relates that a native judge on being asked why he did not use a palki or palanquin, replied that 'anyone may now ride in a palkee; in former days, when we paid 1000 rupees to ride in a palkee or dola, then there was some dignity in being thus conveyed, and none but men of rank were entitled to this privilege.' (2)

Being in such a wretched state, the aristocracy became an object of ridicule and pity for many people. A late nineteenth century poet made fun of the aristocrat 'who dresses gorgeously [to hide his emptiness], coughs loudly, demands large amount of bribes in settling disputes or on hearing of cases, beats his wife, treats the servants cruelly, but who always bends down before the Englishman, who misappropriates public money, who grabs the lands of

(1) Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations, 24 December 1851. No. 163.
Reynolds to Matthie, 15 November 1851.

(2) J. Butler: Travels and Adventures in Assam, p.223.

of the neighbours'.⁽¹⁾

Such was the condition of the aristocracy on the eve of the Mutiny of 1857. Deprived of their political powers, losing their former privileges, facing a dreary present and a dark future, the aristocracy constantly looked back to the past when they wielded the reins of administration and dictated the norms of society. It is not surprising that when the Mutiny seemed to threaten to destroy the British regime, the Assamese aristocracy, thinking the time was ripe, made a final bid for power.

(1) H. Goswami (Editor) Typical Selections from Assamese Literature, Vol. III Part I, p.303.

Chapter VII

The Mutiny of 1857 in Assam

A deliberate attempt was made in Assam in 1857 to over throw the existing regime and to set up a native administration. But the Government was prompt enough to suppress it, and the disturbances in the province as compared to those in other parts of India were slight indeed. This, however, does not minimise the gravity of the situation in 1857 in Assam, for the Mutiny in Assam, apart from its military aspects, had ^a social bearing as well. It sprang from the deep distress of the aristocracy.

In the previous Chapter we have seen how the old nobility were discontented because of the loss of their former privileges after the coming of the British. The grievances of the aristocracy found an exponent in Maniram Dewan, a member of an illustrious family. In

1853 he submitted two petitions to Mills, one on behalf of himself, and the other on behalf of Ghanakanta Sinha Jubaraj (Prince) and other members of the aristocracy, setting forth their grievances.

In his own petition Maniram said that, excepting the district of Kamrup, in the other districts of Assam there was no other ryot who paid as much revenue to the Government as he did, and so he deserved more favour from the rulers than others. It was very difficult for him, he observed, to pay five hundred rupees as annual revenue to the Government for his landed estates. Besides, he had to maintain one hundred and eighty-five members of his household, and he therefore begged the Government to reinstate him in his 'former condition of life as to rank and emoluments'. Having been deprived of ^{the} privileges enjoyed by him and his ancestors 'for four generations', he said, he was reduced to 'a state of beggary', and had been made 'a dependent ryot of a mean individual'. Maniram therefore prayed that 'as I have hereby lost my rank, honor and livelihood, I appeal to your Honor for redress'.⁽¹⁾

(1) Mills - Report on Assam, Appendix K.B. - Petition of Maniram, p.lxiii.

A man who had formerly enjoyed so much prosperity and was now facing distress under the new regime, naturally could not be friendly to the Government. It is not surprising, therefore, that Maniram, despairing of his dreary present, would look back to the past when he and his class occupied the most advantageous position in the social hierarchy. Insofar as his second petition indicates how a member of the old nobility regarded the various changes brought about under British rule, it deserves some detailed consideration. In this petition Maniram brought forth a series of criticisms against the British Government. He began by saying that under the new Government 'respectable offices [are] abolished and the Logwas [paiks] and the Liksos [slaves] taken away, those formerly entitled to privileges and immunities [are] now made to pay revenue and exemptions and prescriptive rights that had lasted for 600 years removed; the fame and honour of respectable people destroyed, and by making them pay revenue like other poor people they have been reduced to the greatest distress'. (1)

(1) Ibid, p.lxxv.

He further said that it might be supposed that by giving pensions to some of the respectable Assamese, great benefit had been conferred on them, but the fact was that 'those who ought to have got pensions did not get any, while those whose services had been but of short duration, and their claims insignificant, proved most successful.....'.⁽¹⁾

Maniram complained that because of the appointment of men from Bengal and Marwar in Assam, the respectable Assamese suffered 'deep mortification'.⁽²⁾ Mills also noted that 'there are in Seeksagur and Gowhathy many young men of high family and good character who have qualified themselves for employ, and it is most discouraging to them to see most of the high and even some of the inferior offices filled by foreigners'.⁽³⁾

Maniram also said that the hill tribes were disaffected on account of the various oppressions on them by the Government, such as depriving them of their

(1) Ibid, p.lxvi.

(2) About the employment of the Bengalis in the Judicial department in Assam, we have dealt with in Chapter four.

(3) Mills - Report on Assam, p.27.

slaves. In fact, though the Government stopped some of the tribes to levy contributions from the lowlanders, the Government paid them cash compensation.⁽¹⁾

He also observed that the establishment of courts brought misery to the people. In fact, some defects had been generally admitted to exist in the judicial system.⁽²⁾

He complained that during the Ahom rule, only the respectable classes took opium, but under the British Government even the lower classes became inveterate opium-eaters, and as a result they became 'lazy and indolent in consequence, and quite unfit for hard work'. There was a great deal of truth in this charge. Major Butler said that 'there is no article of commerce sought after with such intense avidity in Assam as Kanee, or opium; and its baneful effects can only be appreciated by those who witness the degeneracy of the people. It is consumed by all classes, high and low, rich and poor, old and young, men, women and even childredn; and its consumption is limited only by the purse or means of the opium eater'.⁽³⁾

(1) For details, see Chapter III.

(2) For details, see Chapter IV.

(3) J. Butler - Travels and Adventures in Assam, p.244.

Dr. McLean, the assistant surgeon of Dibrugarh, reported that of all the causes which combined to produce sickness and mortality from cholera in common with other diseases, there was none of stronger or more extensive influence than the habit of opium-eating so largely indulged by high and low. The ryots, he said, who composed the bulk of the population, 'the great majority of whom being weak, puny, miserable wretches without stamina to resist those morbid influences with which they came into contact' sank lower every day by the excessive use of opium.(1)

Instead of suppressing the consumption of opium, the Board of Revenue reported that 'there was no sufficient reason to interfere. The Board of Customs, salt and opium have lately introduced the sale of Behar opium into the Province, and with great success. From the rapid increase of consumption it seems not improbable that it will in a great measure supersede the native product'.(2)

(1) Board's Collections, Vol.2639, No.168,095, p.89.
Dr. McLean to the Collector of Lakhimpur, 14 November 1853

(2) Board's Collections, Vol.2541, No.148,248, p.100.
The Board of Revenue to the Bengal Government, 15 July 1851.

Maniram further observed that 'by the entire neglect of the Mathorees (bunds or embankments) the floods destroy the cultivation of the villagers annually'. While the Government built bunds every year, these were not adequate to prevent the floods. Mills admitted that 'in the time of the Ahom Government the banks of the smaller rivers were guarded by bunds, and the country was intersected with well-raised allies (roads) of great height and breadth and which served all the purposes of bunds protecting the crops from inundation. These bundswere "crossed by high pathways, which were again joined by smaller bunds graduating down and connecting the mouzahs, villages and fields". These roads have been almost neglected by our Government, a neglect the more to be lamented as I believe, it had done much to retard the prosperity of this fine District Sibsagar'.⁽¹⁾

Maniram complained that under the British Government cottage industries were declining. Hamilton related that just before the coming of the British, the native women of all castes in Assam, from the queens downward,

(1) Mills - Report on Assam, vide - Seibsagar, p.1.

wove the four kinds of silk that were produced in the country, and with which three-fourths of the people were clothed. He also wrote that considerable quantities of the two coarser kinds were also exported.⁽¹⁾ But after the establishment of the British Government, as the imported clothes were cheaper, the people began to neglect their cottage industries. Jenkins observed that 'instead of employing themselves in making their own clothes, they the Assamese are now very generally substituting those imported from England.....They are now content to sell their raw silk and cotton for manufactured cloths'.⁽²⁾ The results of this change over from one economy to another are described by one contemporary writer thus, 'because of the import of foreign commodities Assamese local industries are fast ~~de~~clining in importance, and as a result, various social strains are to be observed in the province. Our women are not mindful to the weaving of cloth as in former days.....Assam is under-going a dreadful crisis, and nobody can tell when it will end.'⁽³⁾

(1) Hamilton - An Account of Assam, p.61

(2) Mills - Report on Assam, Appendix B, p.iv.
Jenkins to Mills, 23 May 1853.

(3) G. Borooah - Assam Buranji (History of Assam), p.265.

Maniram also said that 'this Province belong[s] to [the Goddess of] Kamykya, and by stopping the Poojahs (worship) at the Temple of Kamykya, which had continued for 600 years and disregarding the religion of the Hindoos, the country has become subject to famines, pestilence and other calamities....'. He said that under the new Government the expounders of religious scriptures, such as the Gita and the Bhagabat were neglected, the purity of the caste system was gone, and as a result 'the people are labouring under the deepest grief and mortification'. He held that 'the influence of the Hindoo Priests over their sheshes (disciples) being undermined' the people were becoming morally degraded.⁽¹⁾ While Maniram deplored the lost influence of the priests, we find that many people gradually lost faith in the priesthood, because of their laxity in spiritual duties. For example, an eye-witness wrote that '.....some priests are misusing their power in a gross manner. Formerly, the punishments inflicted [upon the people] were for the good of the

(1) About the privileges of the Lakherajdars and their laxity and oppression of the ryots we have already discussed in chapter two.

society, but now the priests are more interested in their own welfare, and neglect their spiritual duties. It seems, for them religion is a source of income. As a result of this state of affairs, the people have lost all faith in them'.⁽¹⁾

Another contemporary writer satirically speaks of the priest thus - 'The "saintly priest" puts on the garb of a monk, and saves his disciples by preaching religion; From his lips we hear pious talk, but inside

it is otherwise,

Oh! shame on his spiritualism, shame on

his knowledge! (2)

Lastly, Maniram held that the schools which the Government established were 'of no use'. (3)

After setting forth all these grievances, he prayed to the Government that 'in the shasters [scriptures] it is written, that Rulers ought to practice righteousness and govern their subjects with justice while studying their

(1) G. Borooah - Assam Buranji (History of Assam), p.273.

(2) S. Deka Borooah (Hemchandra Borooah) - Bahire etc. p.66.

(3) Regarding the hostility of the upper classes to education we dealt with in chapter V.

welfare. These are not now done, but the very contrary.... May we therefore ^aparry that, after due investigation and reflection, the former native administration be re-introduced, and the old habits and customs of the people re-established in the country....'.⁽¹⁾

Mills described Maniram's petition as 'so curious a document', and described him as 'a clever but an untrustworthy and intriguing person'. He also observed that 'the condition of the Assamese Ryot is that of much comfort; he is taxed lightly, and labors in peace and security, and certainly it would not be to his interests nor to those of Government that any such change should be made'.⁽²⁾ Mills also added that Maniram's petition had 'created much fermentation, disquietude and dread amongst the lower classes'.

Let us now deal with the events which led to the attempted rebellion of 1857. There were two claimants to the throne - Prince Ghanakanta Sinha, the descendant

(1) Mills - Report on Assam, Appendix K.B., Maniram's petition, p.lxvii.

(2) Mills - Report on Assam, vide - Seeksagur, p.15.

of the king Chandrakanta Sinha, who was expelled from the country by the Burmese, and Raja Kandarpeswar Sinha, the grandson of the late Raja Purandar Sinha, whom the British removed from the throne. In 1852 Ghanakanta Sinha had made an application that 'lands might be allowed him in Kamroop or in failure that he should be allowed an addition to his Pension instead'. But Jenkins held that there were 'very great objections' to the granting of any such lands to him, as he would not be able to make use of them. Besides, 'he must seduce Ryots from the assessed lands in the neighbourhood to the loss of Government and unsettling the habits of the cultivators'. Jenkins therefore proposed an addition of three hundred rupees to the Prince's pension in lieu of a grant of land.⁽¹⁾ But the Governor-General declared that he saw no reason to make any fresh grant of land to the Prince or to augment his pension as recommended by Jenkins.⁽²⁾

In 1855 Jenkins again requested the Bengal Government to grant Ghanakanta 1,000 puras of land, and

(1) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 10 March 1853, No.49
Jenkins to the Bengal Government, 21 December 1852.

(2) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 10 March 1853, No.50
The Government of India to Jenkins, 10 March 1853.

exemption from half the revenue.⁽¹⁾ But the Lieutenant-Governor refused to grant this request.⁽²⁾

In 1857 Ghanakanta wrote to Jenkins that a sum of forty-eight rupees as municipal tax had been levied upon his place of residence, and he declared that 'this has been very unjust towards me, for my ancestors were Maharajahs of this Province... It is difficult as it is to subsist on the trifling Pension received from Government...' He therefore requested the Government for exemption.⁽³⁾ Accordingly the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal granted his request.⁽⁴⁾

While Ghanakanta Sinha had to beg for small sums of money from an alien Government, Raja Kandarpeswar was biding his time to recapture his lost powers and privileges.

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- (1) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 2 August 1855, No.21
Jenkins to the Bengal Government, 26 June, 1855.
 - (2) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 2 August 1855, No.22.
The Bengal Government to Jenkins, 1 August 1855.
 - (3) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 23 July 1857, No.173.
Ghanakanta Sinha to Jenkins, 12 June 1857.
 - (4) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 23 July 1857, No.174.
The Bengal Government to Jenkins, 17 July 1857.

In 1854 Kandarpeswar submitted a petition to the Government where he stated that 'I hold the possession of only 26 poorahs of land where my house (which is in a ruined state and which lies at the mercy of the winds) and garden stand. The means which I have adopted to support my large family for a period of 15 years, is the selling of my property, i.e. ornaments'. He also said that the Collector treated him as 'a common ryot'. He further complained of the lack of respect of the Government for 'a Prince whose ancestors independently reigned in Assam for a period of nearly six hundred years and received homage from the Rajahs of Cooch, Behar, Bijnee and the Cossiah Hills.....' Kandarpeswar then declared that 'to inhabit the forest and to be turned [torn?] to pieces by the wild beasts, are better than to suffer such disgrace', and begged the Government to redress his grievances.⁽¹⁾ But the Lieutenant Governor declared that he saw 'no reason to pass any orders' on this petition.⁽²⁾

(1) Bengal Revenue Consultations 13 July 1854, No.51
Kandarpeswar Sinha to the Lieut. Governor of Bengal (n.d.)

(2) Bengal Revenue Consultations, 13 July 1854, No.52.
The Bengal Government to Kandarpeswar Sinha, 11 July 1854.

In 1856 Kandarpeswar again submitted a petition to the Government. First, he asked to be permitted to draw the pension of one thousand rupees granted to his grandfather and father as a compensation for the resumption of Upper Assam but which they refused to accept because of its inadequacy. He also said that the pension should be granted him together with arrears to enable him to pay off the debts contracted by his father and grandfather and by himself for the support of their families and dependents. Secondly, he asked that 'A zemindaree settlement of Upper Assam be concluded with him, on the terms on which the the Rajah of Burdwan and other zemindars of this Presidency hold their estates.....on the completion of which settlement he agrees to surrender for the future all right to the pension accorded to his ancestor'. (1)

In July 1856 Jenkins made a detailed criticism of this petition. He argued, first, that Raja Purandar Sinha was removed from power because of 'his misgovernment and the consequent confusion the country had fallen into'

(1) Bengal Public Consultations, 13 November 1856, No.138.
Kandarpeswar Sinha to the Governor of Bengal, (N.D.)

and not because of his failure to meet the demands of the Government as stated by Kandarpeswar. Secondly, Raja Purandar and his son Kameswar Sinha refused the Government pension 'not on the grounds of the insufficiency of the allowance but that the acceptance of it would, they supposed, annul their claim to restoration to the throne'. Thirdly, the lands in Assam were held ryotwari, so Kandarpeswar could not be granted a zemindari in Upper Assam. Fourthly, to make any such arrangement with 'a young Prince who.....is highly unpopular with the great bulk of the people' would not only be an injustice to the people, but would 'involve a perpetual loss to Government of the increased assets that would be obtained from the extended cultivation of the lands of which probably much less than a fourth are now cultivated'. Fifthly, if the Rajah's petition was granted, it would place all the tea planters under him as his tenants.

Sixthly Kandarpeswar could have no claim to a pension so long refused by his father and his grandfather contrary to the advice of the Government. Seventhly, as many other members of the royal family and of the high noble families 'are most slenderly provided for and are

still quite destitute', Jenkins could not recommend Rupees 1,000 as a monthly pension to the Rajah.

Eighthly, Ghanakanta Sinha was more acceptable to the great body of the Assamese gentry, and to place Kandarpeswar on a superior footing would be 'a weak compliance with the intrigues that he and his abettors have been carrying on for a long time to the alarm of the Ryots, and the well effected to our Government'.

Instead Jenkins recommended that the Government should consider his case only 'on account of his youth and the manner in which he was neglected by his parents', and he proposed that Kandarpeswar be granted a pension of five hundred rupees a month for life with retrospective effect from the death of his father.⁽¹⁾

In October 1856 the Governor-General declared that Kandarpeswar's 'claim to pension is forfeited and his Lordship in Council sees no reason to give it as a favor'. He also observed that 'in regard to the Rajah's pretensions to the throne of Upper Assam it should be distinctly intimated to him.....that he will never be

(1) Bengal Public Consultations, 13 November 1856, No.137. Jenkins to the Bengal Government, 19 July 1956.

restored to it'. (1)

With his dreams shattered by the Government's refusal to grant his requests, Kandarpeswar now planned to seize 'by force what had been denied to his more peaceful supplications. While Northern India was caught up in the vortex of revolt, Maniram wrote to him a series of letters from Calcutta instigating him to muster his forces against the Government. He began by saying, 'the big house under which you are is very, very old - The posts, the beams (Big House Government) [sic], the fastening [sic] are all broken and the house is very leaky - a little wind will blow it down - at this present to rethatch and repair it being the rain there is neither bat (no troops) nor grass (no troops) for this reason, it is broken away on all side [sic] and rotten.....'(2) He also said that the king of Delhi was soon going to recover his throne, and then 'it will be well for you'. Again, 'the new foundation' in Assam would be in Kandarpeswar's name, and Maniram learnt from history that 'from changing the foundation....many Rajahs and nobles derive benefit'.

(1) Bengal Public Consultations, 13 November 1856, No.140.
The Government of India to the Bengal Government, 10
October 1856.

(2) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 29 October 1857, No.334
Maniram's letter (n.d.)

Further, the 'tigers (mutineers)' devoured thirteen or fifteen thousand Europeans, together with their wives and children, and 'the few that do escape the mad dogs (sepoys) devour by the way'. Again, he said that the rebellion having spread all over Northern India, it had now reached Bengal, and numberless Europeans 'enter the house of Death from which they never can return'. He observed that in Assam the Europeans 'are in great fear and hold their lives in their hands'. Maniram therefore urged, 'you having kept your ears open must stand up - and the forces there you must bring over to your side, by means of gold, and by persuasion, by any, and every means in your power, you must get them over to your side - Agree to augment their tullahs (pay) for the future without doubt good must follow'. (1)

The people, however, did not seem to be very much interested in any change of Government. In June 1857 Jenkins reported that the subject of the cartridges had been 'a good deal talked about and some sympathy has been expressed for the sepoys', but he had not the 'least apprehension' of any interruption of the tranquillity of the Province. (2) The people of Nowgong district seemed

(1) Ibid, Maniram's letters (N.d.)

(2) Bengal Public Consultations 18 June 1857, No.82.
Jenkins to the Bengal Government, 6 June 1857.

to be absolutely ignorant even of the disturbances in Bengal or Northern India.⁽¹⁾ Perhaps the people still remembered the horrors of Burmese rule in Assam prior to the coming of the British. John Butler, the Magistrate of Nowgong, stated in 1854 that 'many individuals....have assured me that innumerable horrible acts of torture and barbarity were....resorted to.....by these inhuman savagesbut they are so shocking that I cannot describe them'.⁽²⁾

Anandaram had observed in 1853 that after the coming of the British 'the people of Assam have now acquired in the safety of their lives and property which they never had the happiness of feeling for ages past'.⁽³⁾ Even the arch-enemy of British rule, Maniram, had declared in 1838 that as the British rescued the people of Assam 'from the sea of Burmese troubles, may God continue their uninterrupted and undiminished sovereignty till the end of a Kalpa (4,320,000,000 years), and make them as vigorous and powerful as the Lord of Amaravati (paradise)'.⁽⁴⁾

- (1) Bengal Public Consultations 18 June 1857, No.83.
The Sub-Assistant Commissioner, Nowgong to the Bengal Government, 6 June, 1857.
- (2) J. Butler - Travels and Adventures in Assam, p.248-9.
- (3) A. Phookun - Observations etc, vide - Mills, Report on Assam, Appendix F. p.1.
- (4) Dr. S. K. Bhuyan - East India Company's relations with Assam, 1771 - 1826, p.765. (quoted from Maniram's 'Assam Buranji (Ms)' (History of Assam)).

Everything seemed to be going on peacefully in Assam. In June 1857 Jenkins reported that the high state of discipline and steady attachment of the 1st Assam Light Infantry to the Government 'at the present crises' was admirable, and he praised Lieutenant Colonel Hannay, Commanding the battalion, for his 'firm and equitable rule and kind and constant attention.....to all the wants and comforts of the men under his command.....'.⁽¹⁾

The Government, however, was much concerned regarding the security of the frontier. In July 1857 Captain McCulloch, Political Agent at Manipur, reported that the Raja of Manipur, having expressed his sympathy for the British Government, had been requested 'to enjoin a strict watch of the Burmese frontier'.⁽²⁾

But events soon took a different turn in the province. In August 1857 Jenkins reported that the Mutiny in Northern India created 'a good deal of alarm' throughout Assam, and some native officers of the 1st Assam Light Infantry had offered the services of their regiments to Raja Kandarpeswar to reinstate him on the

(1) India Military Consultations, 24 July 1857, No.179. Jenkins to the Bengal Government, 23 June 1857.

(2) India Secret Consultations, 28 August 1857, No.140. Captain McCulloch, Political Agent at Manipur to the Government of India, 18 July 1857.

throne. He also noted that Captain Holroyd, the Magistrate of Sibsagar, did not dare to arrest the Raja as 'the sepoys would have interfered to prevent the Rajah's arrest and he might thus have brought on a crisis, which otherwise appeared to rest on contingencies'. As, according to Jenkins, the young Raja was urged towards this line of conduct by Maniram Dewan, he recommended that Maniram 'of whose ill designs there can be no doubt and who is cause of perpetual disturbance in Assam', should be put under arrest. He also said that a small body of Europeans should be sent to Assam, and he concluded that 'without this aid*, we may certainly struggle over the crisis but its mere chance and I trust if the Government has the power it will save us from the imminent hazard in which we may be placed by the open mutiny of either of the local Regiments'. (1)

In September 1857 Jenkins again reported that some of the Hindusthanis of the 1st Assam Light Infantry were 'disaffected and using seditious threats' and were receiving interviews with Raja Kandarpeswar at night. He also noted that there was not the 'least disaffection' in the bulk of the people of Assam and 'whatever discontent

(1) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 17 September 1857, No.482
Jenkins to the Bengal Government, 29 August 1857.

there exists is confined to a few of the nobles and upper classes of the gentry and [who?] I am sorry to say are generally in very distressed circumstances'.⁽¹⁾

Actually, many sepoys of Golaghat, according to the deposition of K^eiram^eat Ali, the native doctor of the unit, declared that 'we will.....go and put the Rajah on the throne and proclaim him.....when we have proclaimed the Rajah we will go on at once to Seeksagur and first set fire to Holroyd Sahib's house and the rest of the houses and kill all the Europeans there, we will make the sepoys there join us and take the magazine, and Treasury[then] go on to Debrooghur, there set fire to all the houses and kill all the Europeans and take the Treasure and magazine and bring it to the Rajah'.⁽²⁾

The situation in Assam seemed critical indeed. Lieutenant Colonel Hannay reported a 'widely disseminated plot under the instigation of Mont^eram Dewan and the young Rajah, for the overthrow of the British Government in Assam in which many natives of the country civil omlah and others are concerned together with 3 native officers of the

(1) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 22 October 1857, No.276
Jenkins to the Bengal Government, 17 September 1857.

(2) India Military Consultations, 18 December 1857. No.131.
Deposition of K^eiram^eat Ali, Native Doctor of Golaghat
taken by Captain Holroyd, 7 November 1857.

Battalion under my command and.....the whole of the non-commissioned officers of the Golaghaut Detachment as also a good many of the men'.⁽¹⁾

The Government moved briskly. The Hindusthani sepoy of the artillery company at Dibrugarh were sent to different small out-posts, so that they might not be able to combine together, and the loyal Gurkhas and the hill men were gradually drawn into Headquarters in Dibrugarh. In September 1857 the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal sent one hundred seamen to Assam.⁽²⁾

In October 1857 the Lieutenant Governor declared that Maniram should be brought to punishment 'for the seditious and treasonable practices in which he is believed to have been engaged'.⁽³⁾ After dispersing the Hindusthani sepoy to different places, the Government ordered the arrest of Raja Kandarpeswar and he was accordingly sent to the Alipur jail in Calcutta.⁽⁴⁾

(1) India Military Consultations, 18 December 1857, No.131 Hannay to Jenkins, 16 November 1857.

(2) F. Halliday - The Mutinies as they affected the Lower Provinces, p.83.

(3) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 29 October 1857, No.335. The Bengal Government to Jenkins, 20 October 1857.

(4) F. Halliday - The Mutinies as they affected the Lower Provinces, p.83. Also Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 29 October 1857, No.336. The Superintendent of Alipur Jail to the Bengal Government, 20 October 1857.

Meanwhile, the Chairman of the Assam Company drew the attention of the Government of India to the dangers existing in Assam and stated that the sepoys in Assam still continued 'to evince a turbulent inclination'. He noted that some of the hill tribes had threatened a descent upon the plains, and because of 'the general thirst for blood and plunder which has been stimulated throughout the land since the commencement of the insurrection.....there is imminent danger of disturbance in Assam, and that in the event of a rising, the Christian inhabitantswould be wholly at the mercy of their numerous enemies'. Besides, the tea-planters had a 'vast amount of property' at stake, and in the event of troubles in the land, all these would be in danger. He also observed that the 'small force of half-trained seamen already sent up' were inadequate to secure the safety of the province. He therefore requested the Government to send a further body 'of disciplined soldiers.....to the province without delay.....' (1)

(1) Parliamentary Papers - 1857-58, Vol. 44.

Paper 2449, p.81

The Chairman of the Assam Company to the
Government of India, 24 October 1857.

But in November 1857 Jenkins reported that there was 'not the slightest ground' for supposing that the peace of Assam was going to be disturbed, and he said that there was 'an excellent spirit of perfect confidence and content pervading the great mass of the population of Assam'.⁽¹⁾

The Chairman of the Assam Company, however, again wrote to the Government of India that the tea planters were feeling great anxiety because of their 'valuable properties in the country'. He also said that the native regiments were still in a disaffected state. He therefore requested the Government to send an additional armed European force to Assam 'so as to provide against the imminent danger that now menaces that province, weakly guarded as it is against insurrection of the troops, or invasion by the surrounding tribes of marauding savages'.⁽²⁾

But in December 1857 the Governor-General declared that 'at present it is not possible to allot

(1) Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 26 November 1857, No.169. Jenkins to the Bengal Government, 14 November 1857.

(2) Parliamentary Papers, 1857-58, Vol.44, Paper 2449, p.317. The Chairman of the Assam Company to the Government of India, 25 November 1857.

any European troops to Assam', and he also noted that the Government did not believe that the mutiny of the sepoys at Chittagong would be followed by the march of the mutineers into Assam. (1)

But on 13 December 1857 the Chittagong mutineers entered the Southern part of the Sylhet district, and were heading towards Cachar and Manipur. To prevent them from entering Assam proper, the loyal Silhet Light Infantry faced the rebels at Latu and in the ensuing fight the mutineers were completely defeated. (2)

The Government, however, was much concerned with the dangers lurking on the frontiers which might imperil the safety of the province. It was reported that various claimants to the throne of Manipur were trying to take advantage of the conditions in the country to seize power. Major McCulloch stated that 'the common conversation of the Munniporees has been in a style shewing that they would rather have nothing to do with the Mutineers, saying that as they are Co-religionists they

(1) Ibid. The Government of India to the Bengal Government 9 December 1857.

(2) F. Halliday - The Mutinies as they affected the Lower Provinces, p.77.

can meet no harm from them, and that all the mutineers want is the sahib's Englishman's life and why sacrifice lives for the feringhee foreigner. Fortunately these are not the Rajah's sentiments.... A revolution would certainly and even attempt at revolution here might bring the Burmese into the scene and entirely alter the position of this frontier. I feel however that the mutineers willbe so kept out of supplies, that revolution with their aid will scarcely be possible and without their aid I think the Raja can hold his own'.⁽¹⁾

For the further safety of Assam, the Government sent a second party of one hundred seamen to the province.⁽²⁾

In January 1858 Major McCulloch again reported 'an extensive conspiracy involving many of the princes and most of the Munniporees in Cachar and some in Sylhet had been formed for the invasion, along with the mutineers of this country'.⁽³⁾ But the rebels were routed in a

- (1) India Political Consultations, 28 May 1858, No.139.
Major McCulloch to the Government of India, 12 February 1858.
- (2) India Military Consultations, 8 January 1858, No.1006.
The Bengal Government to the Government of India
23 December 1857.
- (3) India Political Consultations 28 May 1858, No.139
McCulloch to the Government of India, 12 February 1858.

battle by Lieutenant Buist, Captain Stevens and Lieutenant Ross of the Sylhet Battalion. The defeat of the rebels had the effect of detaching their Manipuri allies.

After 26 January 1858 the mutineers were completely disorganized and dispirited. The remainder of the rebels 'were in a state of suffering which it is painful to record, and were even said, in some instances, to have destroyed their children rather than see them starve. Some men were found dead in the jungle from actual starvation, and to be brief, of the three companies which left Chittagong, not more than three or four men are believed to have escaped death or capture'.⁽¹⁾

In the meantime a burkandaz of Goalpara was tried for inducing some sepoys to rebel against the Government and was executed. Four recruits of the new Kamrup regiment were also tried for desertion and were sentenced each to imprisonment for six months.⁽²⁾

Maniram was executed in February 1858⁽³⁾
The Government finding the situation safe released Raja Kandarpeswar.

(1) F. Halliday - The Mutinies as they affected the Lower Provinces, p.79.

(2) Parliamentary Papers 1857-8, Vol.44, Paper 2449, p.348.
The Bengal Government to the Government of India, 2 Jan, 1858.

(3) Ibid, p.409.

Thus ended the abortive attempts at insurrection in Assam and Manipur. The Government heaved a sigh of relief, and the Governor-General admitted that Assam 'narrowly escaped a crisis'.⁽¹⁾ Sir F. Halliday, the then Lieutenant Governor of Bengal remarks, 'had it not been for the judicious measures of the authorities on the spot, and the prompt despatch of assistance from the Presidency, an insurrection would have broken out, damaging not only to the tranquillity of the Province itself, but also perilling the safety of the whole of our eastern frontier'.⁽²⁾

(1) Ibid. p.902, The Governor General to the Court of Directors, 9 January 1858.

(2) F. Halliday - The Mutinies as they affected the Lower Provinces, p.82.

Concluding Remarks

The attempt at rebellion in 1857 had been suppressed and peace was restored in Assam. It has been suggested in this thesis that the mutiny in Assam was essentially an attempt to restore the past - to return to the days of the Ahoms. In other words the movement in Assam arose as a reaction against British rule and against the wider economic, social and intellectual changes which had accompanied the establishment of that rule.

Assam under the Ahoms possessed a closely integrated society. The population was divided into clans under chief officers of state and priests. The rest of the people, called paiks, had to render compulsory service for four months in the year. Besides this compulsory service, the paiks also paid a capitation tax to the Government. In Upper Assam it was one rupee for each paik. The taxes on some professions were, however, heavier than on the ordinary paiks. Thus the gold and the brass workers had to pay five rupees a head, the makers of oil and the fishermen paid three rupees each and

the silk weavers paid two rupees per head. In some places a plough tax was imposed of two rupees and eight annas a plough. The king granted rent-free lands, and paiks and slaves to the officers of the Government for their maintenance and for the upholding of their dignity.

This system was in strong contrast to the individualistic ideas prevalent in Britain during the first half of the nineteenth century. Under British rule it disintegrated. In addition, when the British occupied Assam in 1826, because of the repeated civil wars the clan system was in a state of confusion and cultivation was in a very neglected state. The British Government released the slaves, abolished the old capitation tax and the taxes on the different professions, and made the peasant the proprietor of his land. The tax on the land varied from one rupee and four annas to 8 annas per pura according to the quality of the soil.

It might have been supposed that Assam would be brought under the system of government prevailing in neighbouring Bengal. But the Bengal system had been found to have many defects. The collectors were ignorant of the resources of the zemindars, and they had neither authority nor opportunity to learn about the condition of

the people. Also, the Government did not benefit from any increase in prices.

Besides, the Bengal system of district administration was based on English ideas. According to the traditional Indian system of Government the executive official had large discretionary powers, but under the new system the supremacy of Law was introduced and the duties of the executive officials were limited.

Until 1808 the home authorities approved of the Bengal or Cornwallis system. But meanwhile Thomas Munro carried out an experiment in Madras which proved very successful. Under this system the revenue was directly fixed on each holding with the ryot, and he was left free to cultivate whatever produce he liked. Munro was a strong critic of the Bengal system, especially of the powers of the district judges, and of the ignorance of the Bengal collectors. The ideas of Munro and others of his way of thinking carried conviction with the home authorities, and in 1816 the ryotwari settlement was introduced in Madras. Under this system the collector became the local representative of the Government and he became better acquainted with the people. The home Government also forbade the Governor-General to sanction a permanent system

in any of the new provinces.

The Government hoped that in Assam also the ryotwari system would work well. But in Assam the Government faced some peculiar problems. Annual floods destroyed cultivation every year. The Government built embankments, but these could not prevent the floods.

Again, epidemics and cattle diseases swept off men and cattle each year and the Government could do little to prevent these widespread diseases. A suggestion was made to import bulls from the North-Western parts. But the imported bulls would also be susceptible to diseases, the holdings of cultivators were small, there were no wealthy farmers and as the Assamese people were not ready to adopt sanitary measures to prevent contagious cattle diseases, the suggestion was rejected by the Board of Revenue.

Besides floods and epidemics, there was another obstacle to the increase of land revenue. This was the class of Brahmin Lakherajdars who held lands at half rates. They were in charge of charitable and religious institutions granted by the former kings of Assam. Though they held very good lands and collected rents twice the Government amount, yet they were very irregular in paying Government

revenue and oppressed the ryots. The Government, however, possibly because of the fear of their influence over public opinion, did not bring about any change in its relations with them. Because of all these factors, cultivation in Assam did not advance and the revenues were stationary.

To improve this state of affairs, the Court of Directors suggested the introduction of long leases in Assam. But the main cause of the unpopularity of long leases was that because of floods, the ryots were not sure of next year's crops. An experiment, however, was made in Nowgong of giving twenty mouzadars leases for five years, but nineteen of them resigned the leases as the ryots refused to accept them.

But after the terrible epidemic of 1853 some measures to improve the economic state of Assam were urgent. A leading Assamese suggested that to increase the revenue of Assam agricultural methods should be changed. But the authorities held that the methods were suited to local conditions; for example, the plough was suited to the strength of the cattle, and any attempt to change the system of cultivation would not be of any use.

The Government now turned to the cultivation of waste lands in the province and to the introduction of a

plantation economy. As local resources were very limited and technical skill was wanting in Assam, already in 1838 the Government granted waste lands on favourable terms in the hope of attracting capital from outside the province. Meanwhile tea cultivation in Assam was becoming popular, but many causes hindered British capitalists from occupying these waste lands. The lands were remote from Bengal, communications were bad and it was difficult to procure labour. However, to extend cultivation, to import a more industrious people from outside, in 1854 the Government granted waste lands to English capitalists on more favourable terms. A question arose whether wastes should be granted to the natives of Assam. But it was decided that as they had no capital, and as they had sufficient lands, they should not be encouraged to occupy wastes as in that case they would abandon the cultivated areas. So the minimum grant was fixed at five hundred acres so that the natives would not be able to apply for such a high minimum.

But as it was difficult to procure good tea lands in one place and as it needed much capital to start tea cultivation, in 1856 the Government reduced the limit in ordinary cases to two hundred acres and in particular

cases to one hundred acres. The main purpose of this measure was to encourage minor speculators.

The Government also started steamer communication in 1847 between Calcutta and Gauhati which brought Assam into closer contact with the rest of India and facilitated the conveyance of labourers.

Under the favourable terms which the Government granted, the Assam Company brought lands under cultivation, opened roads, erected bridges, established ferries on rivers and imported labourers from Bengal. The growth of the tea industry was a very significant event in the history of Assam, and during later decades greatly affected the economy of the province.

As was to be expected from the general trend of policy in British India, the British Government introduced a new judicial system and abolished the old inhuman methods of punishment. It also introduced the Rule of Law and for the first time in the history of Assam all individuals were regarded as equal before the Law. As Assam was surrounded by hill tribes to whom complicated forms and procedures of administration were strange, the Bengal Regulations were found to be too rigid. Moreover, the Bengal system differed so much from that of the Ahom

kings that its hasty introduction would have led to confusion among the rest of the people. Similar difficulties, for example, had arisen elsewhere in India. The British had delayed the introduction of the Bombay Regulations into the Deccan for several years after its conquest. In Sind and in the Punjab the British also evolved a method of administration known as the Non-regulation system more in accordance with indigenous traditions. In Assam, a Code known as the Assam Code was drawn up. But even this system was found to be full of defects.

Corruption was rife among native officials. During Ahom rule the native judges were large slave-proprietors. But after the release of slaves they suffered great distress. Besides, the pay of the Sadr Amins of Assam was lower than those of Bengal. Under Ahom rule they had been in the habit of receiving 'presents' from the people, and they could not accept the English concept of the duties of a public servant. So the state of bribery continued.

The police force in Assam was very corrupt. It was mainly composed of Bengalis. The Government increased the pay of the police darogas and hoped that local Assamese of good families would take these posts, and the tone of the police might then improve. But as

the pay of a jemadar and of a clerk was very low, and as the candidate for the office of daroga had to have filled both these offices previous to his appointment, very few respectable Assamese offered their services for darogaships.

Again, the pleaders were very ignorant, but as nearly all the suits in Assam were under one hundred rupees, the Government decided that the enrolment of a regular body of pleaders would not be beneficial to the people.

Another defect of the judicial system was that Bengali was made the court language of Assam and most people could not follow it. It was only in 1871 that Assamese was introduced as the Court language in place of Bengali.

Again, while most of the cases in Assam were of a petty nature such as the theft of cooking utensils and opium, and the people were illiterate, the law of procedure was very complex. So for the speedy discharge of petty cases and to do away with the evil influence of the native officials, viva voce procedure was introduced. As a result the influence of the native officials was diminished and the disposal of cases was greatly expedited.

The policies adopted in the hill areas had however

no direct relation to those adopted in the plains. In the North-Western Frontier of India, in dealing with the tribesmen two types of policies were adopted in Sind and in the Punjab. In Sind the "closed frontier system" and in the Punjab the "open frontier system" were pursued. The Sind frontier was patrolled and the tribesmen were not allowed to enter British territory without a pass. The Punjab frontier was protected by forts and garrisons. The tribes however were encouraged to trade within British territories. In Assam, no uniform policy was pursued towards the tribes. The lack of an uniform policy arose from the very nature of the problems faced by the Government. Moreover, the matter was complicated by the primitive nature of the tribes which presented problems similar to those raised by tribes like the Bhils and the Kolis in Western India.

Under Ahom rule some of the tribes enjoyed various privileges. The Nagas were given all the inland fishery and rice lands in the plains, the Bhutias possessed the Duars or the passes, the Abors and the Daphlas received a certain sum of revenue and exercised the right of using a portion of the inhabitants called bohotias as porters. The Nagas, the Abors and the Daphlas also established a right

in certain customs or market dues. Again, the Nagas and the Abors exacted dues from the gold-washers who carried on operations in the streams flowing from their hills.

The dependance of certain tribes - the Nagas, the Bhutias, the Abors, the Daphlas and the Mishmis - on the plains arose from the very nature of their economy. The Nagas carried on shifting cultivation and because of the rocky nature of their hills their production of grain was not sufficient for their maintenance. So they used to kidnap the Assamese and demanded ransom from their relatives. Sometimes they sold them as slaves also. The Bhutias and the Mishmis also carried on depredations on the plains as their means of subsistence in the hills were meagre. The Garos and the Kukis, on the other hand, were self-sufficient in their economy, but they carried away human heads for their religious ceremonies. The Nagas indulged in head hunting for customary reasons. The problem of the Nagas was further complicated by the fact that the Nagas had their internal feuds which were very common.

The Government at first tried to stop the feuds of the Nagas by compelling them to attend its courts. They however refused to do so. Instead of complying with

the wishes of the Government, the Nagas murdered three British sepoys in 1844. The local authorities suggested that because of geographical reasons, the guilty Nagas could not be caught hold of, so the only alternative was the burning of villages. But the Court of Directors and the Government of India emphatically declared themselves against this method of punishment and suggested friendly measures to catch hold of the guilty Nagas. Accordingly, a British officer visited the Naga hills in 1846 and made the chiefs promise that they would be friendly to the Government. The Government also decided to start a school in the Naga hills. But as probably, the Nagas were not enthusiastic about schools, nothing was heard of this school later on. The Government also encouraged the Nagas to come to the plains for barter. This measure proved successful for a few years.

But while the relations of Government with the Nagas seemed to improve, in 1849 the native superintendent of the Naga hills Bhogchand went to the hills to settle a quarrel among two Naga chiefs and apprehended the followers of one. The other chief thought that Bhogchand took sides in their dispute, and in revenge killed him and thirteen British sepoys. The Government now sent an

expedition into the hills to punish the guilty Nagas. The British troops captured the enemy village, but the Nagas fled to the hills. Lord Dalhousie now decided that as military expeditions into the hills did not produce fruitful results, the Government's future policy would be non-interference in the internal affairs of the Nagas, though the Government would defend its frontiers from their predatory inroads. He also declared that trade would be encouraged with them.

But the Nagas could not be conciliated so easily, so as in the case of Outram's Bhil corps in Khandesh and the Koli Corps in Gujrat, the Government tried to enlist the Nagas into the Police Militia. This measure proved very successful. The Government also decided to settle Kukis on the Naga frontier. They were fine bowmen - a weapon which the Nagas dreaded. As Naga outrages continued as before, in 1866 the Naga country was formed into a separate district. In 1878 an expedition was undertaken into the Naga hills which became successful. After that the Nagas behaved peacefully.

The Bhutias also gave constant trouble to the Assamese living in the Duars or passes, so the Government occupied the whole of Assam Duars in 1841 but paid them

an annual compensation of Rupees 10,000. But Bhutia outrages continued, and because of military reasons again, during our period the Government did not send any expedition into the Bhutan hills. In 1864 the Government had to undertake an expedition into the hills. This was successful and after this the Bengal Duars were annexed to the British territory and a total sum of Rupees 25,000 was paid to the Bhutias, and peace was restored in the frontier.

The Mishmis also raided the plains, but as in the case of Bhutan, the Government did not send any expedition. The Government however, encouraged a Christian missionary, the Rev. Higgs, to bring about friendly relations with them. He seemed to be quite successful. As in the case of the Naga frontier, the Government also encouraged the Khamtis to settle on the Mishmi frontier. This measure produced fruitful results.

The Garos carried away human heads for their religious ceremonies. At first the Government tried to win them over by personal contact of the European officers. The Government also established a school to civilize them. But as these measures did not produce good results, Lord Dalhousie suggested drastic measures, such as the

imposition of fines. But the Court of Directors insisted on friendly measures, and hoped that more personal contact of European officers with the Garos would be successful. During our period however, these measures were of no avail. At last in 1869 the Garo hills were formed into a separate district and peaceful conditions were gradually restored.

The Kukis, though in the beginning they carried away human heads for their religious ceremonies, eventually agreed to live on friendly terms with the Government. This seems to have been the results of personal overtures by British officers. The underlying reason however may have been that they were self-sufficient in their economy.

Again, the Abors and the Daphlas were in the habit of raising contributions from the lowlanders. The Government gave them a fixed money payment in lieu of the contributions and also gave them stipends to settle in the plains. After this they behaved peacefully.

In short, the Government was successful in dealing with the Kukis, the Abors and the Daphlas, but not very successful with the Nagas, the Bhutias, the Garos and the Mishmis. Indeed, some of these problems are still without solution to the present day.

The establishment of vernacular and Anglo-vernacular schools in Assam was a significant event during our period. The Government also gave grants-in-aid to the schools established by public efforts. The Government established libraries too. The Christian missionaries also started schools, and for the first time in Assam girls' schools were started under missionary auspices. They also published a newspaper named 'Orunudoï' in Assamese which brought educated minds into close touch with events elsewhere.

But a great difficulty faced the missionaries in their attempt to educate the people. This was the introduction of Bengali as the medium of instruction in the schools. But the educational authorities held that there were no proper text-books in Assamese and that the language spoken in Assam was essentially the same as Bengali. It was only in 1871 that the Government came to recognize Assamese as a distinct language and introduced it as the medium of instruction in the schools.

All these factors, the new schools, the establishment of libraries and the missionary efforts greatly influenced the younger generation. The teaching of English led educated Assamese to look to Britain for guidance in many respects. They began to advocate women's

education, supported re-marriage of widows, spoke against polygamy, veiling of women, untouchability and regarded old customs as hindrances to progress. Some sections urged the people to catch up with the West in the art of manufacture. The influence of the Brahmo Samaj also led to similar tendencies, and some leading Assamese supported its cause.

While some people welcomed the new education, some sections of the upper castes and the old nobility were however actively hostile to it, especially because in the schools the boys from high caste families had to sit together with low-caste boys and Muslims. In many cases the teachers refused to admit low-caste boys and Muslims to the schools and even defied the instructions of the Government when it insisted on their doing so. Besides, the higher castes feared that by learning English, students would become Christians. Moreover, some educated sections became enamoured of the ideas of Utilitarianism and began to speak contemptuously of their past literary and cultural heritage. This also frightened the upper castes and the classes.

There were, however, many other reasons why the old aristocracy were discontented under the British

Government. Under Ahom rule, in many ways they raised great barriers to secure their distinction from the lower classes. For instance, the low classes and the castes like Muslims, fishermen, sweepers and braziers were not permitted to wear long hair. If a person of low birth put on clothes hanging beneath his knees, his nose and ears were cut off. The class of fishermen were so much looked down upon that their foreheads were marked with marks of fish so that they might not be able to mix with members of the higher classes.

Again, the aristocracy possessed slaves who were bought and sold like any other article of property. The price of the low-caste slaves was one-third less than those of the higher castes. But the British Government released the slaves without compensation. To afford relief to the aristocracy, the Government appointed them native judges and gave them revenue offices. The Government also granted them pensions, and sometimes gave them advances for marriages and for repairs of houses. The aristocracy however regarded these as inadequate.

While the aristocracy complained of the loss of their privileges, signs were evident that the lower classes and the lower castes under the British Government were

gaining from the change. The former paik and slave was now the independent cultivator of land and in some cases the lower castes refused to render services to the Brahmins such as repairing of roads which were compulsory under Ahom rule. In other parts of India too new forces were influencing Indian society. Missionary activities, the prohibition of Sati, the new schools, the establishment of railways and telegraphs threatened the caste-system and the higher castes in India were in a state of alarm. Moreover, in Oudh and in other parts of India the disgruntled talukdars and the princes who had been deprived of their positions by the coming of the British, were hostile to British rule.

The Assamese aristocracy were only looking for a chance to restore their former privileges. Their grievances found an exponent in Maniram Dewan whose family had held important positions under Ahom rule. In 1853 he submitted two petitions to Mills, one on behalf of himself and the other on behalf of the aristocracy. In these he complained that under the British Government they lost all their privileges and slaves. He also said that under the new Government the purity of the caste system was gone. After pointing out the various defects of the new Government,

he demanded the restoration of the former native administration. The Government however declared that under the British Government the mass of the people were lightly taxed and led a comfortable life, and so refused to comply with his wishes.

There were two claimants to the throne, Prince Ghanakanta Sinha and Raja Kandarpeswar Sinha. Out of these two however, Kandarpeswar took the active part in organizing a rebellion in 1857. In 1856 he submitted a petition to the Government to grant him a pension of one thousand rupees a month and also requested the Government to conclude a zemindari settlement of upper Assam with him. But the Government refused to grant his requests on the grounds that he was very unpopular with the people. The Government also declared that if the native administration were restored, the Government would lose revenue as at present much less than a fourth of the lands were cultivated and besides it would place all the tea planters under his control.

When the mutiny affected Northern India, Maniram wrote to Kandarpeswar a series of letters from Calcutta urging him to muster his forces against the Government. Accordingly, Raja Kandarpeswar secured the support of some members of the discontented nobility and some North Indian

sepoys. The rising was to take place in the Durga Pujas, when in the presence of Maniram and other members of the nobility Kandarpeswar was to be declared the king of Assam.

The whole character of the mutiny in Assam, the motives and intentions of its leaders make it clear, that it was in no sense "a people's movement". In Bengal it has been suggested that cultivators suffered from the exactions of the moneylenders and their resentment against their conditions was expressed in outbreaks of violence at the time of the Mutiny. In Assam however, the conditions were different. Before the coming of the British, because of the repeated civil wars in Assam, there was no stable Government, life was insecure and cultivation was in a very neglected state. The British Government established a strong administration, gave law and order to the country and agriculture was greatly revived. Even the leader of the attempted rebellion, Maniram, had declared in 1838 that because the British rescued Assam from anarchy, God should continue their sovereignty till the end of a Kalpa (4,320,000,000 years).

In suppressing the rising the Government moved briskly. The North Indian sepoy were dispersed so that they might not be able to combine together. The Government

also sent two batches of two hundred seamen from Bengal. Maniram and Kandarpeswar were put under arrest. The Chittagong mutineers entered the Southern part of the Sylhet district and were heading towards Cachar and Manipur. They were however completely defeated. One burkandaz of Goalpara was executed for inducing some sepoys to rebel against the Government. Four recruits of the Kamrup regiment were also imprisoned for six months for desertion. Maniram was executed in February 1858. The Government finding the situation safe released Raja Kandarpeswar.

So the attempt to bring back the past met with failure. But the tensions arising out of the British impact remained.

Appendix A.

Glossary

Adalat	...	...	...	...	...	Law Court
Ali	...	...	...	...	...	Road
Amin	...	...	...	...	...	Subordinate Judge
Bari	...	...	...	...	...	Garden or homestead
Binbuti	..	...	...	...	...	Wet land
Bishoya	..	...	...	...	...	Native official
Bohotia	..	...	...	...	...	Porter
Chapori lands	..	...	...	...	...	Lands liable to frequent inundations.
Chapراسى	.	...	...	...	...	Messenger
Chaudhuri, Chowdhury			...	...	...	Officer in charge of revenue units.
Darogah	.	...	...	...	...	Police officer
Faringati		...	...	...	...	Dry land
Jan	...	...	...	...	...	Stream
Jama, Jumma	...	...	...	...	...	Revenue
Khat	...	...	...	...	...	Farm
Khel	...	...	...	...	...	Clan
Mehal	...	...	...	...	...	Revenue unit
Mauza, Mouza	...	...	...	...	...	Revenue unit composed of villages
Mouzadar	...	...	...	...	...	Officer in charge of a mouza
Munsif		...	...	...	...	Subordinate judge
Omla	...	...	...	...	...	Native official
Paik	...	...	...	...	...	Person who had to render compulsory services to the state during Ahom rule.

Pergana	...	...	...	...	Sub-district
Posa	...	...	...	...	Contribution
Rupit	...	...	...	...	Lands producing one crop of rice only in the year.
Ryot ..	...	...	...	...	Peasant
Ryotwari Settlement	Revenue settlement concluded between Government and peasant without intermediaries.
Sadr	Supreme, chief
Vakil	Agent, pleader

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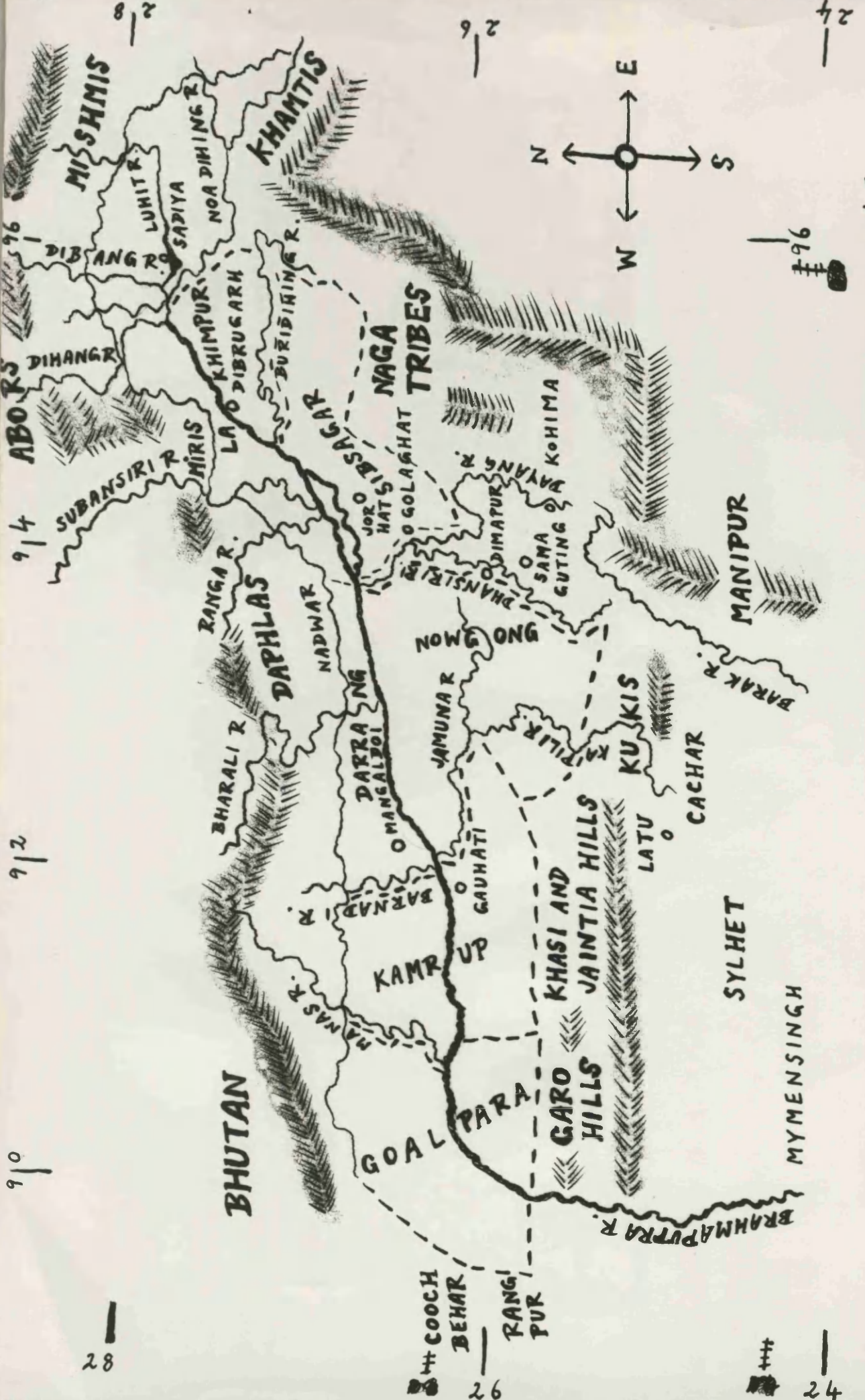
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ASSAM IN 1845

SCALE — 63.1 MILES TO AN INCH

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HILL RANGES